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**Doctor in Education  
Thesis**

**Stimulating innovation in Small Education Action Zones:  
reality or rhetoric?**

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## *Abstract*

*The promotion of innovation is a theme that is commonly found in many Labour Government policies and publications since 1997, especially in education. However, in practice, innovation is often difficult to define and can be challenging to implement.*

*Since April 2000, small (Excellence in Cities) Education Action Zones have been developed as one strand of the Government's 'Excellence in Cities' (EiC) programme to raise standards of education in deprived urban areas of England. The whole Education Action Zone initiative (both large and small) has been promoted by the Government as a test-bed for innovation in order to improve educational standards. This study reviews the development of the Education Action Zone initiative and through an empirical study, investigates the impact that the introduction of small (EiC) Education Action Zones has had on stimulating educational innovation in zone schools in the inner city areas of England.*

*The study considers how the directors of the small zones have interpreted the meaning of innovation, the types of innovation that have been implemented in the zones and the impact that these innovations have had on improving education provision in the zone schools, as well as the barriers and constraints that the directors have experienced when introducing innovations.*

*The key findings from this study indicate that there is uncertainty about the meaning of innovation amongst zone directors, especially whether innovations have to be original ideas or just new within the context of their zone. The impact of the innovations that have been implemented so far is difficult to assess, due to the short timescales involved and the wide variety of innovations introduced. The innovations that have been introduced into the zones, mainly in the areas of pupil support, partnerships, curriculum, ICT and involving the wider community, have been new to the individual zones rather than 'new' per se. The zone directors do appear to have overcome many of the barriers and constraints that they have encountered when implementing innovations in the zones, resulting in thriving active partnerships developing between zone schools which should have positive outcomes for raising achievement in the future.*

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### ***Dedication***

*I would like to dedicate the EdD to my father,  
Jack Crew (1921 – 2001),  
who sadly died before I could finish.*

*From the son who only ever read the Beano.*

## Chapter 1

### Introduction and Background

Innovation, which lies at the heart of the Government's Education Action Zone (EAZ) initiative to improve schools in areas of socio-economic disadvantage, remains an elusive and ambiguous concept. It conveys overtones that suggest a degree of dynamism, risk, creativity, promise and originality; yet at the same time it is vague, nebulous and unspecific. Cros (1999) describes the notion of innovation as having "almost mystical qualities" offering "the promise of hope and a still better future" (p.65). Perhaps it is these qualities that have made it an ideal political tool as a 'buzz' term that implies both freedom and improvement, without context, direction, definition or precision.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines innovation as:

- the alteration of what is established by the introduction of new elements or forms;
- change made in the nature or fashion of anything; something newly introduced; a novel practice, method etc.

The key words in this definition are 'new' and 'change' and these terms are often used interchangeably in educational policy and practice. Although Nicholls (1983), in a discussion about the conflicting definitions of innovation in the context of education, points out that "there is nothing really new in education" (p.2), not all innovations are necessarily new and while innovation often equates with change, not all change is the result of innovation. Silver et al (1997) also crucially note, "innovation may aim to bring about improvement, but does not equate to improvement" (p.4), while Cros (1999) suggests that "newness on its own does not ensure innovation" (p.67).

Nicholls (1983) notes that “the literature abounds with varied and sometimes conflicting definitions of innovation” (p.2), emphasising that (in her view) it is ‘fundamental’, ‘planned’ and aimed at ‘improvement’. Miles (1964) defines innovation in education as being “a deliberate, novel, specific change which is thought to be more efficacious in accomplishing the goals of a system” (p.14), while Rudduck (1991) refers to it as being change which is “conscious, planned and involves some fundamental breaks with the known past” (p.56). A more commonly held view of educational innovation is provided by House (1979): “the deliberate, systematic attempt to change schools through introducing new ideas and techniques” (p.1), although he also notes that:

The most remarkable feature of the educational system is its capacity for continuity and stability in the face of efforts at change...and the inability of innovations to transform schools (p.9).

Hargreaves (2000) emphasises that innovation is both an event and a process, which develops from the creativity that produces the original idea to the response that adopts, imitates and exploits the idea. House (1979) also suggests that ‘innovation’ is often considered as local, small-scale and low-level, as opposed to the notion of ‘reform’, which is concerned with national and broad structural change.

Innovation has also moved into and out of vogue in education at various times over the past 50 years. In Britain the notion of innovation as a major theme in education seems to have been promoted and stimulated following the election of various Labour Governments. For example, the period from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, after the election of the Wilson Government in 1964, saw major innovations in education such as the introduction of the comprehensive system of secondary schooling, major national curriculum projects developed by the Schools Council and the Nuffield Foundation,

Educational Priority Areas, the raising of the school leaving age to 16, etc. However, Nisbet (1975) describes how by the mid-1970s the word ‘innovation’ had become ‘something of a bandwagon’ in the education world and had begun to lose some of its attractiveness. He suggests that it had come to mean:

Something cheap, meretricious and gimmicky, undertaken rashly without adequate resources to see it through, as a protest arising out of frustration and impatience (p.1).

Macdonald (1991) concurs with this view, also noting that by the mid-1970s “the word innovation had a dated feel ...(from) a chapter of our post-war history that has already closed” and the process of change in education had been replaced by the notion of Government directed ‘reform’.

Under a Conservative Government during the 1980s and 1990s, Britain became well practised in systemic reform, which was Government-led, ‘top-down’ and large-scale but did “not necessarily ensure very much change in how teachers and students experience schooling and what they do in classrooms” (Hargreaves 1999, p.54). The explicit notion of innovation in education seemed to be dropped from the political agenda during this period, except with reference to technological innovation (especially in the rapidly developing field of Information and Communications Technology), until the return of a new Labour Government.

In 1997 the newly elected Labour Government declared that education was its ‘number one priority’, emphasising its commitment to raising standards, promoting partnerships and disseminating good practice through a ‘new approach’ as identified in the 1997 DfEE<sup>1</sup> (Department for Education and Employment) White Paper, ‘Excellence in

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<sup>1</sup> The DfEE was redesignated as the DfES (Department for Education and Skills) in 2001.



Schools'. This first White Paper from the new Government implicitly emphasised opportunities for localised innovation alongside new national reforms, such as in literacy and numeracy. The Labour Government appeared to be promoting 'bottom-up innovation' as the antithesis to the model of 'top-down prescription' in education that had been the hallmark of the previous Conservative Government. However, together with this 'new approach' to education, Labour retained much of the Conservative legacy of centralised prescription, accountability, competition and inspection.

One of the first new initiatives launched across the country in 1998 was the development of statutory Education Action Zones (EAZs), initially in 25 urban and rural areas, eventually expanding to a final total of 73 zones by 2000 (DfES 2001b). Michael Barber, head of the new Standards and Effectiveness Unit at the DfEE, emphasised the importance of this high-profile initiative for improving education in areas of social and economic disadvantage, making specific reference to encouraging innovation as a central part of this new approach (Barber, 1998). This approach embraces the idea that "not to innovate is regarded as synonymous with conservatism, stultification, backwardness and loss of dynamism" (Cros, 1999, p.65). However, a report from Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), based on their initial inspections of the first Education Action Zones, suggested that they "have not often been test-beds for genuinely innovative action" (Ofsted, 2001). These inspection findings complement the preliminary findings from the London University Institute of Education research team studying large EAZs, where early results similarly indicated that "the majority of early EAZ curriculum innovations, while new to the area or the schools concerned, are not new to the school sector as a whole" (Halpin, 2002, p.4). These findings may reflect the uncertainty about the meaning of innovation in the context of trying to raise standards in disadvantaged schools.

Another Government area-based education initiative introduced in 1999, Excellence in Cities (EiC), focused specifically on the six major urban areas of England which were faced with the most severe difficulties presented by problems of socio-economic disadvantage (DfEE 1999b). Excellence in Cities adopts a multi-strand approach to improvement, including the expansion of Specialist Schools and Beacon Schools; the development of Learning Support Units and City Learning Centres; the provision of Learning Mentors and extended opportunities for Gifted and Talented pupils; plus the development of small Education Action Zones (later to be re-named in December 2001 by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) as 'Excellence in Cities Action Zones').

Small Education Action Zones were established as part of the EiC initiative to allow for a more intense focus on improving small clusters of schools in the most difficult circumstances within urban areas. The aims of the small EAZs are similar to the large ones - to support "well-focused and innovative programmes to improve pupil performance" (DfEE, 1999b) - on which they were modelled. However, the small zones are usually focused on one secondary school and its local primary schools (between four and eight) and by September 2001, 80 small EAZs had been established. Each individual small EAZ operates within a localised setting and has its own individual priorities (between two and four) for improvement (DfEE 2001).

The zones have common features in relation to their basic aim – to raise standards through improved teaching and learning. How this aim is achieved varies from zone to zone, but the opportunity to explore innovatory methods is a necessary feature in each zone's plans in order to obtain funding. The localised innovations may be in the areas of teaching, curriculum, organisation, staffing, funding or any other area that the zone

schools feel might lead to improvement. This ‘bottom-up’ approach allows small zones to have the flexibility to develop innovations at a micro-scale to meet the needs of their own specific group of schools (DfES 2002f).

When announcing the approval of 14 new small Education Action Zones in January 2001, the then Schools Standards Minister Estelle Morris said “they have the potential to make a real impact and I encourage these new zones to try out new ideas, build up strong partnerships and to innovate in order to raise standards” (DfES, 2001a). Yet these innovations have to complement ‘top-down’ national initiatives, such as those for literacy and numeracy, without adding excessively to the workload of the schools, if they are to be achievable. The development of the large and small zones and their role in stimulating innovation in zone schools will be fully explored in Chapter 2.

The notion of innovation has continued to be central to the Government’s education policy, as indicated by David Blunkett (2000) in a paper on transforming secondary education, where he states that “innovation and good practice is encouraged and wherever and whenever it occurs it is cherished, nurtured, praised and disseminated” (p.22). In a more recent speech on the same theme of secondary transformation, Estelle Morris, the former Secretary of State for Education, continued to describe innovation as the “key to the success of our policies” (2002a, p.8).

The DfES White Paper ‘Schools – achieving success’ (2001c) also promotes innovation as a major theme underlying its future education policy programme, especially in the transformation of secondary schools. This is highlighted by the inclusion of a whole chapter devoted to “Excellence, innovation and diversity” (pp.37-47) in the White Paper. It emphasises that the Government “wants to be able to encourage and respond to innovative approaches” (p.43) and that it:

Wants to ...invite staff (of schools) to work with us to lead the programme of innovation and transformation we need. We want to free the energies, talents and professional creativity of heads, governors and teachers and create the conditions in which schools are freer to innovate (DfES, 2001c, p.37).

This White Paper also indicates the Government's intention to "establish a schools innovation unit in 2002 with the task of initiating and supporting new ways for schools to do their jobs more effectively" (p.43). This unit "will act as a powerhouse and an 'incubator' for new approaches, which may not fit the rules as they currently exist" (DfES, 2001c, p.43). Interestingly, despite the Government's constant rhetoric about encouraging innovation in education since 1997, Estelle Morris (2002b) stated in her speech at the launch of this new DfES 'Innovation Unit' on June 25<sup>th</sup> 2002, "I don't think that we're in an education service that invites innovation or risk taking in the way that we need to. It's too public if you fail, the cost of failure is too great".

The Education Bill 2002 (DfES, 2001f), which emanated from the DfES White Paper 'Schools – achieving success', focused on promoting innovation as a key theme for educational reform "to remove barriers that stand in their (schools) way and free them to adopt new approaches" (p.7). It may be may be possible to interpret the current political 'bandwagon' for promoting innovation in education as the Government running out of ideas and trying to hijack those that have been successful in some schools in a localised context. Whether these local 'successes' can be universally applied in other and different contexts has yet to be seen, the early indications from the evaluations of innovation implementation in the statutory Education Action Zones raise doubts about this and seem to reconfirm the notion that 'there is nothing really new in education'. Gewirtz (1999) argues that successful schools may be reluctant to innovate, whereas schools with poor results may feel that they have little to lose by adopting more experimental approaches but may not have the capacity to implement them.

In my professional life as a teacher, adviser and headteacher, with nearly 30 years experience of inner city secondary schools, I have encountered many new initiatives and innovations designed to raise the achievement of pupils. This has been a period of constant change in education, mainly as a result of successive Government policies seeking to improve schools. Some projects, such as the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) have injected large amounts of funding into schools; others such as the National Curriculum have prescribed what should be taught and more recently the National Key Stage 3 Strategy has prescribed how it should be taught. Although the numerous changes that I have experienced have resulted in teachers now being more accountable for their work in schools, I feel that very few have had a major and sustained impact on changing pedagogy.

Most schools that I currently have contact with appear to be increasingly driven by the fear of failure, in terms of accountability, targets, inspections and league tables. This may have led to the apparent national improvements in standards, as indicated by increasing percentages of pupils achieving higher levels and grades in the end of key stage national tests and in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations. However, I feel that some of this improvement has resulted from a concentration on 'teaching to the tests' in core subjects during critical school years and has also been at the cost of narrowing the curriculum offer to pupils, especially in primary schools. This is reflected in the amount of time and effort devoted each day to the Literacy and Numeracy hours when compared to other subjects, especially in the creative and performing arts.

My present position as the Director of a small (EiC) Education Action Zone in North London has provided me with the opportunity (and funding) to work with a group of

schools to try out new ideas, take risks and look for innovative ways of engaging children and their parents with the process of education in order to raise standards. The DfES emphasis on promoting ‘innovation’ in the small zones as a means of improving standards, which is central to the role of the zone director, led me to question what innovation really meant in practice. I had previously given any real thought to the concept of innovation in education and felt a need for clarity to enable me to carry out my professional role. The relatively isolated role of the EiC Action Zone Director (from other Zone Directors, as there are no formal structures for directors to meet each other or engage in discussion) and the open-ended guidance from the DfES on the nature of innovation that could take place within the EiC Action Zones, provided me with the motivation to find out about the nature and extent of innovations taking place in other small zones across the country through this research. I am also a member of the Forum of a large statutory Education Action Zone, as a governor representing a secondary school in a neighbouring LEA, which gives me an alternative perspective into the workings of EAZs. Therefore in undertaking this research for the Doctorate in Education I am developing my own professional practice, as well as contributing to the wider body of professional and academic knowledge.

This thesis is an exploration of the extent to which the launch of small (EiC) Education Action Zones, as part of the Excellence in Cities initiative, has stimulated local innovation within zone schools or within the Action Zones per se. The research investigates whether the Ofsted (2001) findings about the limited amount of innovation occurring in some of the large statutory EAZs are equally applicable to the small EiC Action Zones, or whether their smaller scale and structure has enabled them to introduce innovations more easily and/or more widely.

The thesis focuses on the following main research question:

“What impact has the introduction of small (EiC) Education Action Zones had on stimulating educational innovation in zone schools in the inner city areas of England?”

This research question will be investigated by an empirical study of the small (EiC) Education Action Zones. It will gather and analyse data using a “mixed methods” research approach, providing the opportunity to explore issues in depth (e.g. through interviews and case studies) and breadth (e.g. through a national questionnaire survey). The main research question will be investigated through an investigation of the following secondary or sub-questions:

- What do the directors of small (EiC) Education Action Zones understand by the term ‘innovation’ in school and educational settings?
- What types of innovations have been introduced or planned by the individual small (EiC) Education Action Zones?
- Are these innovations ‘original’, new to the zones or just extensions of initiatives already introduced elsewhere?
- What impact have these innovations had on the zone schools?
- What are the barriers or constraints to the introduction of innovations within the small (EiC) Education Action Zones?

To my knowledge, no research has yet been undertaken into the type or nature of innovations planned or implemented by the small EiC Action Zones, or the impact of these innovations on zone schools. However, some of the research into the large statutory EAZs, such as that currently being undertaken by the University of London Institute of Education, often includes a consideration of aspects of curriculum innovation in their work and any relevant findings from these studies will be drawn upon in this research. The outcomes from this study may be able to inform current

practice in small zones, especially as they apply for extension at the end of their initial three years and the transformation of statutory EAZs into EiC Action Zones over the next few years, as well as having possible applications for enlightening school improvement policy, research and practice in the future.

### *Chapter Summary*

Innovation in education is an elusive concept, easy to advocate as a panacea for problems, but infinitely more difficult to put into practice. Innovation has been prominent in many of the policies of the current Labour Government and has been a dominant feature of the whole Education Action Zone initiative over the past five years. This introductory chapter has tried to briefly set the scene for innovation within the statutory EAZs and the development of small Action Zones within the Excellence in Cities initiative, explored in more depth in Chapter 2. The broader context of the development of the EAZ initiative within the wider education policy arena and the management of educational change are discussed in Chapter 3.

The background and current professional role of the researcher is also discussed in this introduction in order to offer an indication of how the research questions developed out of my professional work and interests. Chapter 4 describes how I attempted to address these questions through the design of the research, while Chapters 5 and 6 offer a full description of the findings as they relate to the research questions. In Chapter 7, short descriptive accounts of five case studies of small zones are used to illustrate many of the issues highlighted in the findings, within the real life context of these zones and the work of their directors. The research findings are discussed in the final chapter and conclusions drawn about the impact that the introduction of small (EiC) Education Action Zones has had on stimulating educational innovation in zone schools.



## Chapter 2

### The Policy Context

This chapter reviews the development of the small (EiC) Education Action Zones, with particular reference to the centrality of ‘innovation’ within the Action Zone concept. As the small (EiC) Education Action Zones evolved directly from the establishment of the large statutory Education Action Zones, it is important to be aware of the policy development, background and context of both the large statutory EAZs and the Excellence in Cities initiative, of which the small zones are one strand, as well as that of the small zones themselves.

#### *Statutory Education Action Zones (EAZs)*

As already noted, the first White Paper published by the new Labour Government in July 1997 (only two months after its election) was *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE, 1997) which indicated that education was at the heart of the new Government and its ‘number one priority’. This White Paper proposed the establishment of Education Action Zones to provide “targeted support and development where they are most needed” (p.7) and these were then created as part of The School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

Michael Barber, in a speech announcing the guidance for applications for the first statutory EAZs, described them as the “centrepiece of our modernisation agenda....an explicit encouragement by central Government of bottom-up initiative and innovation in challenging areas” (Barber, 1998, p.5), while also somewhat ambitiously stating at the time that “those who lead EAZs will, therefore, be helping to invent the future”. The then Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett, called the zones an entirely new way of delivering the education service. Conversely, Whitty (2002) describes them as “an eclectic mix of new right and old left ideas” (p.24). Riley et al (1998) also note

this apparent contradiction of views, “whilst the EAZ initiative incorporates some of the increasingly prescriptive features of other innovations, paradoxically it also creates the opportunity for deregulation and innovation” (p.4).

Perhaps, more ominously, Stephen Byers, the then deputy minister for education, claimed that statutory EAZs would represent a “real threat to those vested interests which have for far too long held back the school system” (Byers, 1998). This comment alludes to the opportunities for the deregulation of certain aspects of national education legislation that would be possible within the Action Zones, which could undermine the powers of both the national teaching unions and the local education authorities. Riley et al (1998) note that “the planned creation of Education Action Zones was initially interpreted as a major challenge to LEAs” (p.4), but also point out the Government emphasis on the LEAs having a significant involvement in working in partnership with the statutory EAZs.

In September 1998, the first 12 statutory EAZs were designated to tackle entrenched underachievement in disadvantaged urban and rural areas of England. By January 1999 a total of 25 large zones were in place, with the Government already launching its second round of applications to start in September 1999 (DfEE, 1998). However, in a cautionary note about the application process, Tomlinson (2001) suggests that “there was some concern expressed that the problems of the poor could not be solved by the market solution of competitive bidding for action zones, and that the status of being a designated zone might be seen as a stigma by communities” (p.103). The zones were established “to encourage innovation and ensure successful innovations were mainstreamed into standard practice within their schools” (DfES, 2001d). It was also felt that within the statutory EAZ areas “deep-seated problems will require a fresh

approach if they are to be tackled successfully. This is why so much emphasis has been placed on the need for those people working in zones to develop innovative strategies” (DfEE, 2000). There are currently 73 statutory EAZs established (see Appendix 1) including two ‘virtual’ zones linked by ICT that are not geographically based and no further new statutory zones are planned (DfES 2002b).

Education Action Zones are statutory bodies normally comprised of two or three neighbouring secondary schools, their partner primary schools (often totalling between 15 and 25) and nearby special schools, all working in partnership within a local area and its community (DfES 2002b). Statutory EAZs have charitable status; therefore they are organisationally independent of LEAs and accountable directly to the Government. The strategic direction and priorities for each zone is set by a statutory Action Forum comprised of a range of stakeholders representing schools, parents, governors, businesses, the local authority and community organisations etc. The day-to-day management of each zone is through a Project Director who has responsibility for implementing the zone’s action plan to meet improvement targets for the pupils and schools in the zone (DfEE 1999a).

The zones were initially planned to operate for three years, although most have been extended to five years, during which time they have directly received up to £1 million per year from the Government and business partners. However, Gewirtz (1999) notes that this “is substantially less than the annual budget for an average sized secondary school, suggesting that the significance of the policy may well be more symbolic than substantive” (p.146). She also argues that the initial three years is not enough time to take the risks needed for genuinely innovative solutions to address educational underperformance.

The Education Action Zones are expected to both innovate and, at the same time, rapidly produce tangible results in terms of raising standards and promoting inclusion.

Du Quesnay (1999) suggests that trying to do both of these things simultaneously caused confusion and questioned whether the zones were really about innovation or just about compensating for failure. Gewirtz (1998) also argues that “given the DfEE’s expectation that primary schools will prioritise basic skills and that secondaries will develop work-related curricula, it is questionable how much genuine experimentation there is likely to be in EAZs” (p.60).

Although DfEE (1998) guidance for statutory EAZs suggests that it is not prescriptive about the types of innovation that the EAZs may wish to propose, a study of the first applications by Riley et al (1998) indicates that “concerns had been expressed by Ministers that children should not be used as guinea pigs” (p.6). They also report that the successful applicants for the first statutory EAZs generally played it ‘safe’ in terms of non-radical innovation proposals in their plans, in order to obtain approval.

In 1999 the DfEE launched its second round of statutory EAZs, again with “a strong emphasis on innovation... (which) will be the hall mark of the second round” (Blunkett, 1999). The Department’s invitation and guidance to Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to apply for establishing new ‘second phase’ zones - “Meeting the Challenge, Education Action Zones” (DfEE, 1999a) - makes it clear that the Government’s view of innovation in the statutory Education Action Zones was based on what might be regarded as ‘structural’ change. These changes are based on the deregulation of certain aspects of national education legislation, which would allow zones the opportunity to:

- opt to disapply the national teachers’ pay and conditions agreements so that new locally negotiated contracts could be set;

- modify or disapply parts of the National Curriculum;
- cede some or all of the functions of zone school governing bodies to the EAZ Action Forum.

Much of the early literature about statutory EAZs in their initial development focuses on the implications and empowerment of these legislative ‘freedoms’ for zones, EAZ funding mechanisms involving the private sector with regard to the repercussions for other areas of state education and the power relationships between statutory EAZs and their host LEAs (for examples, see Halpin 1999a; Power and Whitty 1999; Dickson et al, 2001; Power and Gewirtz, 2001). Thrupp (2001) suggests that the focus by some researchers on the possibilities resulting from these ‘freedoms’ is due to statutory EAZs being seen to “epitomise a potentially emerging Third Way approach to public service reform”. However, Halpin (1999b) describes disappointing signs of how the “EAZs currently underway are not overmuch the vanguard of reform. A form of first way conservatism rather than third way innovatedness seems to have taken hold in many places” (p.356). Research into the statutory EAZs by the University of London Institute of Education indicated that “no zone has so far made use of...these freedoms” (Halpin, 2002). The finding that “no zones have yet chosen to exercise their legislative powers” (DfES, 2001d) was also confirmed by the Government in their public announcement in November 2001 to bring an end to the statutory EAZ initiative.

In January 2001 a research report by the Institute for Public Policy Research (Lissauer and Robinson, 2001) stated that statutory EAZs had moved from the ‘flagship to the backseat’ of Government expectations, perhaps because of the unresponsiveness of the large EAZs to adopt the Government concept of ‘innovations’. During early 2001 further suggestions were being made that the Government was disappointed in the work of the statutory EAZs (Hackett, 2001). Despite denials of these suggestions by the

Government, the commentary on the first six zone inspections by the Office for Standards in Education, published in February 2001, was unenthusiastic about the progress that the statutory EAZs had achieved at that point. It reported that “they have not often been the test-beds for genuinely innovative action” (Ofsted, 2001, p.2), but sometimes had introduced ideas or initiatives that were new to the schools or the area, rather than being ‘new’ per se. The research work on statutory EAZs reported by Halpin (2002) also supports this view, but it also found “many instances of EAZ funding being used to prop up and extend pre-existing initiatives” (p.4).

However, Gewirtz (1999) makes an important point that “whilst EAZs may not result in much authentic innovation, the discourse of innovation.... may produce a different kind of effect in EAZ schools” (p.157), in terms of encouraging a climate which advocates the promotion of new ideas, expectations and processes. A similar view was recently expressed in the statutory EAZ Annual Report 2001 (DfES, 2002b), which describes the commitment and enthusiasm shown by staff who work in the zones as having a catalytic effect on raising educational standards. It notes that “they have encouraged innovation, providing the impetus and ideas to overcome local barriers to achievement in creative ways” (p.6). However, the development of a school culture that can take advantage of this innovation discourse to change practice takes time, which is not always available in the lifetime of the zones.

By March 2001, the then Secretary of State for Education, admitted that there had been a failure amongst zones to deliver innovations at the expected pace (Blunkett, 2001). This was reinforced in the EAZ Annual Report for 2000/1 in which the new Secretary of State observes that although “....zones were set up to develop new approaches to persistent problems. Some zones have been more cautious than others in taking risks” (DfES, 2001a, p.1). This view is also mirrored in the PricewaterhouseCoopers (2001)

evaluation of the statutory EAZs, which notes that “it seems that the EAZ framework itself has not led to some of the specific innovations that were hoped for” and “a perceived tension between the DfEE desire for innovation and its desire to see programmes which concentrated on getting the basics of literacy and numeracy right” (p.2). Halpin (2002) takes a similar view that “the potential for radical innovation (in statutory EAZs) has also been squeezed out by other Government measures” and by the “unrelenting pressure to show ‘results’ within short time scales” (p.4).

Further indications of concern about the work of the statutory EAZs were highlighted in the EAZ Annual Report 2000/2001 (DfES, 2001b), which noted that the key stage performance of secondary schools in the scheme had improved at a slower rate than the national average, and in a report published in January 2001 by the National Audit Office (NAO). The NAO report (2001) was based on an examination of the financial procedures operating in the first 25 statutory EAZs during their initial period of operation in 1998-99 and described how:

Some Zones were spending money before they had sound financial controls in place, creating risks of poor accounting, impropriety or poor value for money. In addition some Zones experienced difficulty in raising the expected levels of business contribution (p.2).

The DfEE responded to this report by improving the financial advice given to zones in the EAZ Handbook (DfEE 2000) and engaging the Technology College Trust (TCT) to give advice to the zones on fundraising. However, the difficulties of attracting sufficient business sponsorship to the statutory EAZs continued to be an ongoing issue for some of the zones (Woodward 2001, DfES 2002b).

The schools within the statutory EAZs have also continued to be inspected by Ofsted in line with the national inspection framework, therefore only the highly successful

schools were likely to feel secure enough to take risks with new innovations. By their very nature, statutory EAZs, as support structures for schools in England's most disadvantaged urban and rural areas, are unlikely to contain many (if any) highly successful schools. The concept of emancipatory innovation in education described by Clarke (2002), where schools in zones are set free from centralised Government restrictions, is somewhat blunted within a culture of inspection, accountability, performance and league tables.

In a speech at the EAZ National Conference in November 2001, the School Standards Minister (Stephen Timms) announced the end of the statutory EAZ initiative (DfES, 2001d) when the zones had completed their five-year lifetime. This meant that the first zones would come to an end in their present form in August 2003 and the last zones in April 2005. However to soften this announcement, it was also suggested that the statutory EAZs could continue the progress that they had made by being 'transformed' into small non-statutory EAZs or Excellence Clusters as part of the Government's Excellence in Cities initiative (DfES 2001d). As a result of this 'transformation' strategy, the large EAZs would lose the 'innovative deregulation powers' bestowed by the Government in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and also become directly under the control of their Local Education Authorities. David Hopkins, as Head of Standards and Effectiveness Unit at the DfES, suggests, in the EAZ Annual Report 2001, that the transformation strategy is an acknowledgement of the contribution the zones have made. He also indicates that the changes "will bring synergy and coherence to our area-based school improvement initiatives...under the remit of our successful EiC initiative" (DfES, 2002b, p.6) and that it will also integrate the statutory EAZ work better into the framework of other Government national education priorities.



### *Excellence in Cities (EiC)*

The increasing concern by the new Labour Government about the relatively poor performance of some inner city secondary schools in the major urban areas of England led to the launch of a further new initiative in March 1999 known as ‘Excellence in Cities’ (DfEE 1999b). According to Barber (2001), the purpose of this new initiative was “to make ‘Excellence for Everyone’ a reality rather than just a slogan” and to break down “the isolation of many inner-city schools and encourage a new sense of shared endeavour” (p.31). The Excellence in Cities initiative was planned to enhance quality by providing both equity and diversity in urban secondary education.

The EiC initiative, started in September 1999 as the Government’s major education improvement programme for urban areas, initially focused on six large conurbations: Inner London, Birmingham, Manchester/Salford, Liverpool/Knowsley, Leeds/Bradford and Sheffield/Rotherham (DfEE 1999b).

Unlike the launch of the statutory EAZ initiative, there was no bidding process for LEAs to be involved in Excellence in Cities, the Government simply targeted what it regarded as “the urban areas that faced the most severe difficulties presented by problems of social disadvantage” (NFER, 2000) as areas requiring intervention. The LEAs in these areas were required to submit plans to the DfEE for the implementation of the Excellence in Cities initiative, which had to include creative and innovative proposals, to redress disadvantage and secure raised standards in urban secondary schools.

Excellence in Cities adopts an eclectic multi-strand approach to improvement, in a pragmatic attempt to reflect the wide range of needs present in inner-city schools and the many dimensions of educational provision in urban areas (DfEE, 1999b). A central

feature of the policy is described as “diversity of provision within a coherent framework” (DFEE, 1999b, p.23), although how the coherent approach within and between the inner city LEAs was to be achieved was unclear in the Government documentation about EiC.

Initially EiC was only focused on the transformation of the secondary phase of schooling, although a few strands were subsequently extended as a pilot scheme in selected primary schools in some LEAs from September 2000 (DfEE 2001; DfES 2002a). The three major core strands, focused on meeting individual pupil needs, funded through the Excellence in Cities programme (DfEE 1999b) are:

- Extended opportunities and programmes to stretch gifted and talented pupils in lessons and after-school provision;
- Trained Learning Mentors for all pupils who need them, to work with individual pupils to remove barriers to learning and reduce disaffection;
- Self-contained Learning Support Units to tackle disruption in schools and give challenging pupils intensive help and support without disrupting the education of their classmates.

Other initiatives, aimed at strengthening school provision and stimulating innovation, also funded through the EiC programme in these inner city areas are:

- A network of new City Learning Centres to provide state of the art ICT facilities for local schools and the community;
- The expansion of the Specialist Schools programme;
- The expansion of the Beacon Schools programme; and,
- The introduction of Small Education Action Zones to raise standards in one or more secondary schools and their associated primaries.

Advising on the inspection of LEAs and schools involved in the Excellence in Cities scheme, Ofsted (2002) note that “the EiC initiatives should not be regarded as separate

from one another. The intention is that they will have an impact that is greater than the sum of the parts”.

All of the above EiC strands have a focus, either explicitly or implicitly, on using innovation to raise standards and engender school improvement. However, for an individual secondary school, securing Beacon School (Moynihan, 2002) or Specialist School (Ofsted, 2001) status or a City Learning Centre on site (Stoney et al, 2002), not only provides access to additional financial resources, but also enhances the public image of the school (Kendall et al, 2002), often leading to improved recruitment. On the other hand, the additional financial benefits that belonging to an EiC Action Zone brings to a secondary school can be far less than the other EiC strands and the ‘stigma’ (Riley et al, 1998) of failure associated with being in a zone, can act as a deterrent to some schools becoming involved.

The EIC programme was expanded into a further 23 local authorities in September 2000 (DfES 2002a). A third phase of expansion took place in September 2001 to add ten more urban authorities and Excellence Clusters of small pockets of deprivation outside of the major cities; plus Excellence Challenge to widen participation and extend the opportunities for able young people in deprived EiC areas to have access to higher education (DfES, 2002a). In the 2002/3 financial year, the Government allocated £200 million for Excellence in Cities and this is expected to rise to over £300 million<sup>2</sup> in 2003/4 as the programme is fully implemented.

A consortium comprised of the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), London School of Economics (LSE) and the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) is undertaking the overall national evaluation of Excellence in Cities from the summer of

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<sup>2</sup> Source: DfES Standards Site EiC News ([www.standards.dfes.uk/excellence/news](http://www.standards.dfes.uk/excellence/news)) 27.03.02

2000 to December 2003. The consortium reported in its preliminary findings in March 2002, that as a result of the seven policy strands being at different stages in their implementation, a patchwork of activities meant overall generalisations were difficult to make and there is little hard evidence of impact (Kendall et al, 2002). Studies of the seven individual strands (including small action zones) would not take place as part of this evaluation until 2002/2003. The researchers reported anecdotal evidence of change, from all parties involved, and that the benefits of EiC were perceived to be positive for the future. Although, in the consortium's 'Overview of Interim Findings' report (Stoney et al, 2002) there were concerns about "the potential divisiveness of the targeted strategies and that the majority of pupils in schools – those of middle ability and without particular needs – were not reaping the full benefit of EIC" (p.35).

#### *Small (Excellence in Cities) Education Action Zones*

The first 12 small (EiC) Education Action Zones were established in the inner city areas of London, Greater Manchester, Birmingham, Merseyside, and West Yorkshire in April 2000 as part of the introduction of the Government's Excellence in Cities initiative. By September 2001, 80 small zones were in operation, with nearly a third of these being located in London (see Appendix 1) and by April 2002 a total of 102 small zones were in existence (DfES 2002a). No further small zones had been planned for after this date, although many of the statutory EAZs located in EiC urban areas are expected to 'transform' into small zones within the EiC framework once their statutory lifespan comes to an end over the next few years.

The small Action Zones were created to allow a "more intense focus on schools in the most difficult circumstances" in areas where the model of the large EAZs was thought to be too broad, and to build on the "well-focused and innovative programmes to improve

pupil performance” (DfEE, 1999b, p.23) already established by the large EAZs. Although at the point when the small zones were established as a concept, there was little evidence from the large zones to support the above statement from the DfEE.

Small (EiC) Education Action Zones typically focus on a single secondary school and its associated primary schools (these are often neighbouring primary schools, rather than feeder primaries) in England’s most deprived urban areas. There are usually about six or seven primaries in each zone, but this number varies across the country and zones sometimes include a local special school (DfEE 1999c). One factor in the DfEE rationale for the grouping of schools to form a zone includes “a high proportion of schools ...under special measures, with serious weaknesses or causing concern” (DfEE 1999c, p.3). In some LEAs the lead secondary school in the zone was chosen by the LEA as being identified as needing extra support as part of an overall strategic plan for the authority, in others secondary schools were allowed individually to bid for inclusion in a small zone.

The small zones are all non-statutory bodies and operate within the EiC Partnership structure for each LEA, which has overall responsibility for the strategic management of each zone. Each zone has identified two, three or four key priorities to tackle the particular problems faced by the zone schools. These include raising pupil attainment in core subjects, improving primary to secondary school partnerships and pupil transfer arrangements, tackling social inclusion, supporting families in the education process, improving ICT skills and resources<sup>3</sup>. The priorities for all zones are underpinned by the principle of raising attainment and achievement of pupils, but each individual zone was

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<sup>3</sup> (source: [www.standards.dfes.gov/eaz](http://www.standards.dfes.gov/eaz)).

free to develop priorities (and a subsequent Action Plan to address these priorities), which met the specific needs for improvement identified by the zone schools themselves. This point is emphasised in the EAZ Handbook (DfEE 2000), which states that “it is not for this guide to be prescriptive about the types of innovation which EAZs may wish to put forward – that is for them to decide” (para.6.1.2).

The day-to-day management of each zone is delegated to a Project Director, who may be full or part-time, and is responsible for delivering programmes to meet the zone’s priorities. The small zones also have the equivalent of an Action Forum (although these operate under different titles) to provide a strategic overview of the work of each zone, but unlike in the large zones, these have no statutory powers or constitution.

The small zones receive a basic £250,000 a year from the DfES Standards Fund paid through the partnership LEA for at least three years, plus matched funding of up to £50,000 per year from the DfES for any cash or ‘in kind’ sponsorship funding obtained from private sector businesses or external agencies. This gives each small zone the opportunity to raise up to £350,000 each year for initially three years<sup>4</sup>, which may be extended to five or more years by the local EiC Partnership Boards.

The above description of small (EiC) Education Action Zones indicates that they were planned to function as small-scale versions of the large Zones, albeit without the statutory legislative framework and powers that allowed the large zones to act independently of their LEAs and to be directly accountable to the Government. The early guidance on developing small zones reflected this position, with information about small zones simply being a watered-down version of that provided to the large

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<sup>4</sup> (source: [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/eaz/zones\\_explained/small\\_zones/](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/eaz/zones_explained/small_zones/))

EAZs (DfEE, 1999a). This is also indicated by the fact that the chapter on Small EAZs is ‘tagged’ on as the tenth and final chapter in the DfEE EAZ Handbook (DfEE, 2000). Even within the structure of the DfES, the team administrating small zones was located as part of the statutory EAZ team rather than being attached to the Excellence in Cities programme team. The weak initial guidance for small zones led to some problems for LEAs and EiC Partnerships in developing plans for prospective zones in what was effectively an information vacuum.

Additional documentation was produced in order to clarify some of these issues, which was more specific about the rationale behind the setting up of small Action Zones (DfEE, 1999c). Amongst other information, the supplementary guidance provided a list of the broad areas that most zones were prioritising, including raising the quality of teaching and learning, pupil support, family support, working with businesses and tackling social exclusion. These broad areas were only offered as an illustration and the small zones were free to set their priorities “flexibly to meet local circumstances” (DfEE, 1999c, p.6), following an audit of need for the particular configuration of schools in each zone. The guidance also suggested that any innovations proposed to tackle educational issues needed to be realistic, deliverable and linked to a real local problem.

However, the announcement in November 2001 signalling the end of the large statutory Education Action Zones and their possible future transformation into non-statutory small zones within the EiC initiative prompted a need to rationalise and clarify the guidance provided for the small zones. As a result of this, the DfES published new and more comprehensive guidance in December 2001 (DfES, 2001e), which also confirmed the Government’s renaming of small zones as ‘Excellence in Cities Action Zones’.

This change of name was significant as it indicated an apparent policy shift to realign the small EAZs firmly back into the whole Excellence in Cities programme, as it was felt that there had been a tendency for some zones to “gravitate towards an isolated, independent existence” (DfES, 2001e). This point is reiterated in a discussion about the drawbacks of innovative ways of working found in the guidance about the future of the small zones from the DfES (2002f), “it may also be that (some) zones work in isolation from their LEA and EiC Partnership, modelling themselves on the independent nature of statutory EAZs” (p.3). The move to divorce the small zones from the large EAZs can also be seen in the statement that “the EiC Action Zones have developed their own distinct characteristics and have moved out of the shadow of the statutory EAZs” (DfES, 2002a, p.22) found in the Annual Report on EiC for 2000-2001.

The new guidance also clarified the role and responsibilities of the EiC Partnership and how it might determine the future of EiC Action Zones. Up to this point the zones had reported directly to the DfES. However, the new guidance placed the formal review and monitoring of the zones, after their first year, firmly within the remit of the LEA EiC Partnership Boards. As part of this accountability process, the DfES recommended unequivocally “that the EiC Co-ordinator is the appropriate person to manage the Project Director of the zone” (DfES, 2001e, p.28) and that the review should consider how effectively “the zone has collaborated with and incorporated the work of other EiC strands...and contributed to the wider EiC objectives/targets” (DfES, 2001e, p.5). The EiC Partnerships have also been given the responsibility for deciding if a zone will continue after its initial three years for as long as they are needed or whether the resources should be redeployed to a new zone based around a different set of schools in their LEA (DfES 2002f).



Some of the zone Directors that I met in my professional capacity interpreted these new guidelines as a constraint on their flexibility to attempt imaginative and innovative solutions to address some of the localised problems of schools within the zones. It has also been suggested that the closer ties into the wider EiC initiative is an attempt to bring the zones more directly into the delivery of the Government's reform agenda of national strategies, such as the roll out of the Literacy, Numeracy and Key Stage 3 Strategies.

The implications of this tightening of policy within the initial three-year life of the small zones will be explored later in Chapter 6, alongside other constraints or barriers to developing innovations identified by zone directors.

### *Chapter Summary*

The evolution of small Education Action Zones since 2000, as part of the Excellence in Cities initiative, and the influence of the large EAZs on their development has been detailed in this chapter to provide an understanding of the context in which they developed. This context underpins many of the issues raised through this research and offers the background within which the research was undertaken.

However, the whole EAZ initiative also needs to be viewed within the broader context of both educational policy making and the management of change that has been taking place in education in recent years, as will be explored in the next chapter.

## Chapter 3

### The Broader Context

In order to understand the place of the Education Action Zone and Excellence in Cities initiatives (including the small action zones) within the wider education system of England, it is important to consider some of the broader political and educational contexts in which they were formulated, located and implemented. Ozga (2000) suggests that “governments seek to use education for specific purposes: as a means of improving economic productivity, as workforce training, as a sorting and selection mechanism for distributing opportunities” (p.10). The current Labour Government launched the area-based EAZ and EiC initiatives (DfEE, 1997 and 1999b) to improve the educational provision for disadvantaged communities, in order to “make equality of opportunity a reality (and) ...to eliminate underachievement in the most deprived parts of our country” (DfEE, 1997, p.3).

This chapter will explore the broader context within which the concept of Education Action Zones developed and from two different perspectives:

Firstly, the evolution of Education Action Zones from the perspective of national Government education policy-making and implementation processes will be reviewed to establish the policy background, purpose, development and trajectory of the EAZ and EiC initiatives.

Secondly, the research into the ‘management of change’ in education will be reviewed to consider the implications of this work in relation to the implementation of innovations in the small (EiC) Education Action Zones.

### *The Education Policy Arena*

Education policies at any level do not suddenly emerge from a vacuum (Taylor et al, 1997, p.6), they are the result of complex policy making processes involving many competing factions, contexts, backgrounds, political and educational ideologies. Policies are always the product of compromises between multiple agendas and influences (Ball, 1994, p.16).

During their implementation, policies undergo a further process of reinterpretation and change, so that the final outcomes may not only differ from the original concept, but also within different contexts. Trowler (1998) summarises this position where:

Policy must be viewed as something which is in a state of constant change in a number of sites. It should be viewed, too, as both text and discourse. Education policy, then, is multi-dimensional in character (p.86).

During the 1980s and 1990s the plethora of Conservative education reforms, seemingly influenced far more by political rather than educational ideology, confirmed the perception of educational policy making as being the sole preserve of the Government. The formulation of education policies by the Conservatives during this period progressively marginalized the input of teachers and LEAs and became increasingly influenced by right-wing individuals and think-tanks, such as the Centre for Policy Studies and the Hillgate Group. The underlying tension during this period lay within the paradox of a government trying to centralise and control education, while simultaneously devolving powers to schools, encouraging choice and market forces to 'improve' the quality of schools.

The election of the Labour Government in 1997 continued most of these reforms under the rhetoric of 'raising standards', whilst introducing more education policies with an

underlying mantra of ‘zero tolerance’ of failure (defined mainly in academic terms). In a discussion of the avalanche of Labour education policies after the 1997 election, Ball (2001) notes that “very little of previous Conservative policy, of which there was also a great deal, has been dispensed with” (p.45). However, Tomlinson (2001) points out that under New Labour:

...there were changes in the approach to policy making. More emollient approaches to partners in the education enterprise were apparent, with a stress on new kinds of cooperation and partnership with local authorities and with private business (p.86).

The emphasis here is on schools and LEAs operating in a spirit of co-operation and partnership, rather than the ruthless competition in education that had dominated Conservative Government policies over the previous two decades.

Barber (2000) suggests that the current Government’s approach to education modernisation and reform is centred on developments at the policy and strategy level “which extends, deepens, builds upon and transforms the reforms of the previous Government rather than reversing them” (p.5). For example, Gewirtz (2002) describes how New Labour remained committed to the principles of choice, competition and private funding in education promoted by the Conservative Government. Although she argues that these principles often conflict with other reforms aimed at promoting equality of opportunity, such as statutory EAZs, which have been implemented by the labour Government to address the disparities found in areas of socio-economic disadvantage.

Barber (2000) describes the process of the modernisation of the education system by Labour, as having started with an ‘improvement wave’ to raise standards, followed by a ‘transformation wave’ of innovation, diversity, inclusion, evidence-informed practice

and practice-informed policy. The launch of Education Action Zones, as part of the new Government's first White Paper 'Excellence in Schools' (DfEE, 1997), symbolised this new 'improvement wave' approach. In order to achieve this improvement, Simpson and Cieslik (2002) emphasise that "EAZs were given the discretion to experiment with innovative ways of achieving a 'bottom-up' approach to policy making through empowering people and communities" (p.120).

The EAZ initiative also heralded an area-based approach to targeting the improvement of education standards in some parts of the country, operating alongside other generic national reforms. This approach emanated from a concern that pupils in some areas of England (mainly in the inner cities) were perceived to be differentially underachieving as a consequence of increased inequalities resulting from the application of market forces in the public sector (Ozga, 2000). Whitty (2002) describes the statutory EAZ policy as "a recognition of the necessity of positive discrimination...that signals a clear break with the policies of the Conservatives" (p.120).

The statutory EAZ policy in education was part of a wider Government area-based agenda of initiatives focused on disadvantaged communities as seen in Health Action Zones, Employment Zones and the New Deal for Communities programmes. Part of the underling rationale behind the statutory EAZs was that they were supposed to work in partnership with these other services and sectors in a holistic 'joined up' (or third) way to implement effective school improvement and combat exclusion.

Power et al (2000), (cited in Carter, 2002), describe the statutory EAZ policy as:

An area-based intervention aimed at tackling disadvantage, with an emphasis on experimentation, public-private sector partnership, community participation in education decision-making and co-ordination of different welfare sectors (p.12).

As an area-based initiative in education, Education Action Zones were not new, as they were partly modelled on the Education Priority Areas (EPAs) developed in England in the 1960s. Hatcher and Leblond (2001) note that the Zones d'Education Prioritaires (ZEPs), set up in France in the 1980s and re-launched in 1998, are a similar initiative to the statutory EAZs, designed to improve educational achievement in socially disadvantaged areas. However, Hatcher and Leblond do indicate significant differences between the two initiatives such as "the role assigned to the private sector in EAZs is not paralleled in ZEPS" (p.12). Indeed, the launch of statutory EAZs led Skidelsky and Raymond (1998) to argue that "much of the current thinking on using Education Action Zones to overcome educational and social disadvantage have their roots in the work done on EPA projects more than 30 years ago" (p.6). Halpin (2002) and Whitty (2002) both point out later, that the Government did not really appear to learn from or make use of either of these earlier experiences when setting up the EAZs. Halpin (2002) also notes that there are major differences in management and funding between the old EPAs and the new statutory EAZs, especially in terms of the public/private partnerships at the heart of the EAZ initiative, not found in the EPAs.

The speed with which Labour initiated the statutory EAZ 'flagship' policy "from a concept which focused on schools in 'challenging circumstances' ... (to) one which sought to create testbeds for new ideas" (Hannon, 2001, p.191) suggests that the new Government was trying to address a whole raft of issues through one single policy, eventually leading to problems in its implementation. Ozga draws on the research of Whitty et al. (1993) on the City Technology Colleges (CTC) scheme to illustrate parallels between the CTC initiative and the statutory EAZs, in that they both carried a "heavy weight of policy expectations in terms of transformation of culture and, especially involvement of private enterprise" (Ozga, 2000, p.110). She also points out

that both initiatives shared the “characteristics of speedy, and relatively unplanned, implementation”. Hallgarten and Watling (2001) also suggest that by the time the statutory EAZs were in operation “the policy making and implementation processes had already dampened (rather than enhanced) the innovatory potential of Education Action Zones” (p.144).

The ambivalence that the Labour Party displayed towards the role of Local Education Authorities, at the time of its election to Government in 1997, has led to suggestions that EAZ management structures, with the statutory powers of their Zone Forums, were initially being trailed as alternatives or replacements for LEAs (Tooley, 2001). However, it was always proposed that LEAs would play a significant role in supporting and working in partnership with their Education Action Zones (DfEE, 1997, p.39) as part of the whole agenda to promote high standards and set targets. As Hallgarten and Watling (2001) point out “almost all zones have, to a significant extent, been dependent on the LEAs for their design, development and operation” (p.151).

The deregulatory ‘innovative’ freedoms given to the zones to enable them to operate outside of national legislation in terms of opting out of teachers’ pay and conditions, the National Curriculum and ceding some or all of the functions of zone school governing bodies to the EAZ Action Forum, also suggest that the Government may have been using the zones to ‘test the water’ at a political micro-level to see how far they could push the boundaries for various stakeholders in the education system, such as the national teaching unions, governing bodies and LEAs.

The Labour Government appeared to perceive an image of zones as becoming autonomous bodies, with a group of schools being run by the zone director as a ‘superhead’, managed by an EAZ Forum operating like a business corporation, within

which teachers negotiated individual agreements on pay and working hours and pupils engaged in a curriculum based on vocational and life skills, in order to ‘break the mould’ of the education provision in disadvantaged areas. However, this image never materialised partly, as the PricewaterhouseCoopers (2001) research into statutory EAZs reported, due to overlaying a centralised improvement agenda onto an initiative that was intended to promote a de-centralised approach, which “compromised the EAZ policy objectives at the point of implementation into practice” (p.53).

The reluctance of any of the statutory EAZs to take advantage of any of the deregulatory ‘freedoms’ led to the zones taking a different policy trajectory from that anticipated by the Government when it originally produced the policy. This lack of compliance by the policy implementers could have been the result of the EAZ policy being initially unclear, which invited the readers to reinterpret and develop a sense of ownership of the policy (Bowe et al, 1992). It could have also been from pressure for schools in the zones to remain within the national systems, as a result of some schools having strong ‘principled objections’ to the nature of the ‘freedoms’ bestowed on the statutory EAZs.

As the innovative legislative ‘freedoms’ were not adopted, so the zones recreated and re-contextualised aspects of the policy to meet their own needs and the needs of their schools. An indication of this attempt at local ‘ownership’ of the policy is described by Carter (2002) who notes that “EAZs have had to work hard to assert the importance of responsiveness to locally identified need and initiative within their action plans and development strategies” (p.53). However, the EAZs still needed to operate within a national context, described by Fullan (2001b) where “schools are suffering from having a torrent of unwanted, uncoordinated policies and innovations raining down on them



from hierarchical bureaucracies” (p.109). A review of progress in statutory EAZs undertaken by The Centre for Educational Leadership and School Improvement (CELSI) at Canterbury Christ Church University College (Learmonth and Wilkins, 2002) concluded:

Much less has been achieved against those criteria which focused on changes to structures and governance, procurement arrangements, and contractual terms and conditions. The decision of Zones to concentrate on standards rather than structures, and to prioritise projects offering direct and practical assistance in schools, cannot be regarded as a weakness (p. 21).

Fullan (1992) suggests that “failure to implement an ill-conceived or poorly developed policy, or a bad idea is obviously a good thing” (p.22). However, lack of enthusiasm displayed by the majority of the statutory EAZs to take advantage of any of the opportunities for deregulation granted to them in the Government policy may have been one of the factors, alongside the lack of business sponsorship and slow rate of improvement of secondary schools (Woodward, 2001), that influenced the decision (DfES, 2001d) that they would be wound up at the end of their five-year lifespan and transformed into small EiC Action Zones or Excellence Clusters.

### *EiC: A Bridge from Improvement to Transformation?*

As noted earlier, the launch of the Education Action Zone policy in 1997 was firmly located within the ‘improvement wave’ of the new Labour Government agenda to raise education standards, whereas the Excellence in Cities policy (DfEE, 1999b) is described by Barber (2000) as “a bridge from improvement to transformation” (p.11). The EiC policy appeared to be produced as a reaction to the ineffectiveness of earlier policies to rapidly improve inner city education in England. In its policy rationale (DfEE, 1999b), the Government describes how “standards in inner city schools are not rising fast enough or consistently enough”, “we might expect inner city schools to

improve faster” and “the gap between the highest and lowest performing pupils has continued to widen” (p.10), resulting in “a new urgency to improving inner city (secondary) schools” (p.2). These statements give a clear indication of what the government wanted to achieve in urban areas through the EiC policy.

The response to these concerns was the launch of a range of programmes (including the establishment of Small Education Action Zones), under the umbrella title of the ‘Excellence in Cities’ initiative launched in 1999 (as described in Chapter 2). Although Excellence in Cities purported to recognise “that a variety of economic and social factors impinge on the work of schools in the most disadvantaged areas of our country” (DfEE, 1999b p.4), there was no suggestion of adopting a ‘joined-up’ approach with other non-educational agencies or initiatives to tackle these broader issues in a coherent way, as had been suggested earlier for the statutory EAZs (DfEE 1999a). EiC simply focused on the urgent need for ‘transformation’ of inner city secondary schools and “enthused over measures to raise standards, offer challenging opportunities and achieve excellence with diversity” (Tomlinson, 2001, p.104).

There are some similarities between the Excellence in Cities policy and the statutory EAZ policy in that they are both area-based and focused on a partnership approach. However, there are also major differences. For example, within the Excellence in Cities policy there was no application process to ‘bid’ for involvement, no attempt to provide opportunities for deregulation of national structures, plus an embracing of the role of Local Education Authorities as the key agents in raising standards and as the “delivery agents of central Government policy” (Tomlinson, 2001, p.105). The establishment of small (EiC) Education Action Zones was only one strand of this large initiative and, as noted earlier in Chapter 2, the creation of small zones was not regarded as one of the

three main core strands of EIC that were targeted directly at supporting pupils, but was part of a further group of initiatives focused on improvement at the whole school level.

The presumed understanding of the model of the large Education Action Zones already operating, plus the paucity of initial guidance from the DfES for the small zones (discussed in Chapter 2) as an addendum to the statutory EAZ policy guidelines, initially led to a very broad interpretation and implementation of policy in the small Action Zones. This resulted in a wide and diverse range of organisations, structures, priorities and external funding from the private sector, evident in the first 80 small EAZs, being established during the first two phases of zone development in 2000 and 2001 (DfES 2001e). This almost 'laissez-faire' and non-prescriptive approach by the DfES to the development of the small EAZs was curtailed in December 2001 when tighter operational guidelines were published (DfES, 2001e), as noted earlier. These new guidelines may have resulted from a policy shift, as their publication quickly followed the announcement that the large statutory EAZ initiative would come to an end and that the large EAZs could then be 'transformed' into small (EiC) Education Action Zones. Therefore greater clarity was needed regarding the operation, role and nature of the small EAZs within the Excellence in Cities framework. This new guidance led to the small zones having to be much more accountable for their work within the whole Excellence in Cities programme, answerable to each Local Authority EiC Partnership Board and it strongly advised that the zone directors should be directly line-managed by the LEA EiC co-ordinators, rather than zone headteachers. The apparent need of the Government to separate the work of the small zones from that of the large (and now apparently out of favour) EAZs was clearly signified by an official change of name of the small zones to 'Excellence in Cities Action Zones', as part of this process.

### *Innovation and Educational Change.*

As discussed in Chapter 1, the concept of promoting innovation as a vehicle for school improvement is central to the philosophy of Education Action Zones (large and small). Fullan (2001a) notes that “in schools ...the main problem is not the absence of innovations, but the presence of too many disconnected, episodic, piecemeal, superficially adorned projects” (p.109). A similar point is also made by Nicholls (1983): “there would appear to be no shortage of educational innovations, and it is the implementation rather than the creation which presents certain difficulties and problems” (p.3). The role of the zone directors is to identify which innovations will lead to improvement in the schools in their zones and manage the process of implementation in order to raise achievement (DfEE 2000). However, to accomplish this role, the zone directors need to understand that:

The most effective innovations involve mutual understanding and readiness to compromise (or mutual adaptation), both by those propagating the policy and those implementing it. For successful implementation educational managers need to be aware of the cultural configuration within their organisation and to consider the likely responses to innovations” (Trowler,1998 p.86).

Innovation inevitably stimulates change, which can be positive, dynamic and exciting; it can also be risky, threatening and difficult to achieve. Stoll and Fink (1995) describe change, instability and resistance as the compelling realities of all aspects of contemporary society and cite an apt quote from the historian Gustavson (1955), which captures why many people are reluctant to embrace change:

People are afraid of drastic innovations, partly because (they) prefer the familiar, and partly because the vested interests of people are normally bound up with the existing set up. Added to the weight against change is what might be called instrumental inertia, a proneness to keep the machinery running as in the past unless strong pressure for change materialises (p.72).

In the case of Education Action Zones, the ‘pressure for change’ relates to the urgency with which the Government wants to break the cycle of underachievement for pupils in the disadvantaged areas designated as action zones, combined with the short lifespan of the zones, which creates an imperative to produce quick results. However, the innovations and changes within the zone schools need to be viewed as an additional localised layer to the national context of change within education. Hopkins (2001) describes the amount of change expected of schools as “having increased exponentially over the past fifteen years” to a point where change is now “endemic and all pervasive” (p.35) within the education system.

The research and literature on planned educational change, the change process and managing change, especially the work of Michael Fullan (1982; 1991; 2001a, for example), has tried to keep pace with the complexity of continual change in education. In describing the complexity of change, Fullan (2001a) notes that any significant innovation requires individual implementers to work out their own meaning; takes time; needs pressure and support; meets resistance, conflict and disagreement, and needs planning that incorporates these features plus addressing all of the factors known to affect implementation. To understand the change process, Fullan (2001b) outlines the issues that also need to be considered, as summarised below:

- The goal is not to innovate the most (it can lead to burn-out).
- It is not enough to have the best ideas (they don’t always match the context).
- Appreciate the implementation gap (a dip in performance after initiation).
- Redefine resistance (see it as positive and reflective).
- Reculturing is the name of the game (not implementing single innovations).
- Never a checklist, always complexity (change is a journey, not a blueprint).

The increased knowledge about educational change has led to the situation described by James and Connolly (2000) where:

Unfortunately for schools, the requirement to undertake educational change has coincided with a realisation of the complexity and hence the problematic nature of educational change. Change in schools is mostly difficult and complicated. It is not often easy and simple (p.3).

This statement is particularly true for many schools in small (EiC) Action Zones serving disadvantaged areas that are being encouraged to innovate and change by the zone directors, but find difficulty in responding. Hopkins (2001) points out that “it is exactly because change is a process whereby individuals need to ‘alter their ways of thinking and doing’ that most changes fail to progress beyond early implementation” (p.38). Busher (2001) also observes that “teachers are also able to exert power to resist change, so no proposed or planned change can be guaranteed successful implementation without skilful attention by the innovators to the politics of bringing about change” (p.87). Fullan (1991) notes that real change “whether desired or not, represents a serious personal and collective experience characterised by ambivalence and uncertainty” (p.32), as it moves through the process from initiation, implementation to institutionalisation.

Increasingly, since the 1960s in Britain, the main impetus for change in education has come from the demands of successive Governments and their policy makers. Fink (2001) suggests that “unless policy makers are prepared to understand the influence of context, micro-politics, school culture, the emotions of teaching and learning styles on educational changes in schools” (p.230), their ‘top-down’ compliance strategies for change are bound to fail. The policy makers who planned the introduction of Education Action Zones in 1998 may have underestimated the willingness or ability of the

‘stakeholders’ in the zones to initiate any of the deregulatory measures available to them. The emotional response to change resulting from the ‘imposition’ of statutory EAZs on many schools, plus the political opposition to these deregulatory powers by many teachers and others (Theakston et al, 2001), probably exerted an influence on how the EAZs eventually operated in practice. Fink also argues that “policy implementers have a different orientation to the change process from policy initiators” (2001, p.228) and that “policy makers and policy implementers ...focus on different and in some cases conflicting purposes for education and educational change” (ibid, p.232). The personal experience and background of the policy makers may also give them a different, and perhaps incompatible view of schools to that espoused by Ball (1997) as complex, dynamic, contradictory and sometimes incoherent organisations.

The research on managing educational change is described by Reynolds (2001) as one aspect of the paradigm of school improvement that has developed over the past 40 years, alongside studies into school effectiveness. Ouston (1999) and Reynolds (1997), amongst others, suggest that the school effectiveness and school improvement paradigms have had a huge and increasing influence on national education policy, especially the Labour Government’s programme of educational reform since 1997. A generic and widely quoted definition of school improvement, indicating the centrality of change to the process, emanates from the work of van Velsen et al (1985):

A systematic, sustained effort aimed at change in learning conditions and other related internal conditions in one or more schools, with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively (p.48).

Stoll and Fink (1995) emphasise how this definition signals “the intricate relationship between school improvement and change” and “while improvement occurs within schools, their location within the larger education system is indicated” (p.43).

Hopkins et al (1994) also feel that school improvement is chiefly concerned with building the organisational capacity for change and growth. The aims of the statutory Education Action Zone and the Excellence in Cities policies, to improve the education provision for disadvantaged communities, are consistent with this notion of 'school improvement'. Although it is worth noting the point that Fullan (1982; 2001a) makes, that genuine school improvement cannot be externally mandated and that the real agenda is about changing the school culture, rather than the implementation of single innovations. Against this background, the challenges of trying to implement new innovations in zone schools, already regarded as performing below national standards, can only exacerbate the difficulties and complexities encountered in the change process, especially in terms of the relatively short initial three-year life-span of the zones. Stoll and Fink (1995), elaborating on earlier work by Fullan, emphasise that "effective change takes time ...even moderate change can take from three to five years, while complex organisational restructuring may take much longer" (p.46).

The zones not only had to initiate any planned innovations within individual schools but also across the whole zone in many cases, thus multiplying the scale of both the difficulties and the resistance. Therefore the zones identified and focused on changes that were specific to their needs, manageable and realistic, within the context of the multiplicity of other demands that were being made on the schools. This scenario may provide the possible context in which Riley et al (1998) portray the innovations in the early zones as 'safe', and as noted earlier, Halpin (2000) describes a hesitancy to take risks with totally original innovations in many statutory EAZs. James and Connolly (2000) argue that "change that is initiated to improve pupil achievement is likely to involve taking a risk...to the life chances of the pupils" (p.18), the associated emotional



burden of making the decision for such a change creates a powerful inertia to maintain the status quo or go for a tried and tested option.

Fink (2001) also signifies that “the policy maker will want clear, measurable evidence that change has occurred” (p.234). This statement is true of the Action Zones, which are expected to report annually on improvements in zone schools, including national assessment results for a variety of age ranges of pupils, in order to guarantee continued funding. The demand for short-term improvement would certainly stifle any enthusiasm for major changes or radical innovations, which may make the schools more even vulnerable to scrutiny from external agencies, such as Ofsted. This is especially true in the context of the EAZs being located in areas suffering from social and economic disadvantage, where the pupils are likely to be amongst those regarded as underachieving (DfEE 1999b; DfES 2002b). Many of the schools themselves will have been judged as under-performing by national standards or even deemed to be ‘failing’ by Ofsted, therefore they may only have a limited capacity to manage change.

The scope for localised change and innovation within large and small EAZs is broad and largely self-determined by the schools. The localised changes may be in the areas of curriculum, training, staffing, resources or any other area that the schools feel might lead to improvement. However, these changes will be taking place alongside the operation of other initiatives resulting from the implementation of other school, LEA or Government policies. Hopkins (2001) notes that “this places great stress on the organisational capacity of the school and the confidence and maturity of those leading the change process” (p.40).

If the role and status of zone Directors as agents of change also varies between zones (both large and small), this may affect their relationships with the constituent

headteachers (who will also have a range of knowledge, experience and status) leading to a complex power relationship within each Action Zone, which may enhance or inhibit negotiations about the change process or the initiation of new innovations. The importance of this relationship is emphasised by Busher (2001):

Strategies for negotiation for implementing change cannot work without access to power. Whilst it might be important for innovators to gain support from powerful people in an institution, they also have to exercise power in their own right (p.89).

The concept of innovation as a means of improvement pervades many of the programmes for change that have been instituted since the Labour Government came to power in 1997 (Cabinet Office, 1999). This is particularly true within education, where the Excellence in Schools White Paper (DfEE, 1997) set the tone for most of the policy developments that have happen since, by stating that “we (the Government) will seek to work ...to develop innovative approaches to schooling” (p.43) through to the more recent White Paper, Schools Achieving Success (DfES 2001c), which continues to advocate that schools should be given “the freedom they need to excel and innovate” (p.4). The whole of the Excellence in Cities (DfEE, 1999b) initiative is underpinned by the concept of developing local innovations to improve educational opportunities. However, whereas the EiC strands such as Beacon Schools or Specialist Schools are based on individual (usually successful) institutions, which are encouraged to innovate and are confident enough to meet the challenge of change, the EiC Action Zones are focused on a small group of schools in “the most difficult circumstances” (DfEE, 1999b, p.23). Stimulating innovation in this situation, therefore creates its own challenges for the zones, which are different from those found in other initiatives.

The statutory EAZ and EiC Action Zone initiatives provide the opportunity for clusters of schools to access additional funding, resources, support and partnership structures to attempt new innovations to raise the achievement of their pupils. This allows some of the 'risk' aspect of improvement through innovation to be shared between the zone structures and the schools (for whom it is lessened but still a major factor in this era of performance and accountability). However, the ambiguity about the meaning of innovation (described in Chapter 1) and the complexity of implementing innovations in schools described earlier in this chapter, may have curbed many plans to make radical changes within the zones and pushed them towards adopting innovations that have already demonstrated success elsewhere. Whether any of the innovations taking place in zones at present will become embedded and sustainable in the future will not be determined until after they complete their lifespan. Even if any innovations stimulated by being in an Action Zone do prove to be successful in raising standards, will they continue to be implemented at the same scale once the funding stream dries up?

### *Summary*

This chapter has tried to locate the development of statutory and EiC Education Action Zones within the broader context of educational policy development in England since 1997 and draw out the implications from the research on the management of change on the introduction of innovations within zones. This chapter, together with Chapter 2, attempts to provide an understanding of the development and background for the small (EiC) Education Action Zones and their role in stimulating innovation in zone schools, against which the following chapters on the empirical research should be considered.

## Chapter 4

### The Research Design

The previous two chapters provide a context and background to the development of large and small Education Action Zones, as vehicles for tackling the problems faced by many schools in socio-economic disadvantaged areas of England. My personal interest in the challenges of urban education and my current professional involvement in the work of a small (EiC) Education Action Zone led to a focus for this study on the following main research question:

“What impact has the introduction of small (EiC) Education Action Zones had on stimulating educational innovation in zone schools in the inner city areas of England?”

As already noted in the introductory chapter, this research question was investigated by an empirical study of innovation in the small (EiC) Education Action Zones. The study focused on the cohort of 80 phase one and phase two zones, which were in full operation in January 2002, at the start of the research. Data were collected by employing a ‘mixed methods’ approach from primary and secondary sources, using both quantitative and qualitative techniques, so as to provide a range of material about the research question from a variety of different perspectives. This afforded the opportunity to corroborate the findings, and thus enhance the validity of the data, through methodological triangulation (Denscombe, 1998). Aldridge and Levine (2001) also note that combining different methods of data-gathering can give beneficial results:

The rationale is that the questionnaire will provide basic information about the sample from which generalisations can be made to the whole population...Interviews (then) yield rich evidence that complements the generalizable but thin data from a questionnaire (p. 58).

Thus the mixed methods approach enabled issues to be explored both in depth, through information gathered using data instruments such as interviews, and in breadth, through a national questionnaire survey and an analysis of documentary data from the DfES. This also allowed for data on the nature, extent and impact of innovations to be collected and reported on at a variety of scales and contexts from a national overview, to individual small (EiC) Education Action Zones through the case studies.

When choosing the range of data collection techniques to be employed, consideration was given to the manageability of the research (in terms of scale and time), the accessibility of documentation, interviewees and case studies, as well as possible ethical issues that may arise from the research. The choice of these techniques followed the principle outlined by Merriam (1988):

In judging the value of a data source, one can ask whether it contains information or insights relevant to the research question(s) and whether it can be acquired in a reasonably practical, yet systematic manner (p. 105).

In order to identify common issues relating to innovation in small (EiC) Action Zones, the main or first-order research question was investigated in response to the following second-order or sub-questions:

- What do the directors of small (EiC) Education Action Zones understand by the term 'innovation' in school and educational settings?
- What types of innovations have been introduced or planned by the individual small (EiC) Action Zones?
- Are these innovations 'original', new to the zones or just extensions of initiatives already introduced elsewhere?
- What impact have these innovations had on the zone schools?
- What are the barriers or constraints to the introduction of innovations within the small (EiC) Action Zones?

These questions provided the framework for both the questionnaire survey of the whole cohort of zone directors and for drawing up the interview schedule, which explored these issues in more depth with a sample of directors from small (EiC) Action Zones. The choice of methods adopted for the research and the order in which they were carried out was influenced by the desire to initially develop a national overview of innovation in EiC Action Zones, in order to identify broad common patterns and themes. Therefore data were collected at a national level through documentation and a questionnaire survey, prior to focussing on innovation in individual zones through follow-up interviews and case studies.

Using interviews allowed the responses from a sample of the zones to be investigated in more depth, as noted by Wellington (2000) “interviews can reach the parts which other methods cannot reach” (p. 71). The subsequent focus on a small number of case studies provided a more holistic perspective of individual zones to illustrate the differences and similarities encountered by the zone directors in stimulating innovation. The case study approach also offered a vehicle for applying a range of different research methodologies (such as site visits, interviews, discussion and the study of documentation) to different settings.

### *Background Information*

In order to collect data at a national level, the Education Action Zone Team at the DfES was contacted by a letter from the researcher in January 2002 to request background information on the 80 small (EiC) Action Zones operational at that time. The information was supplied in the form of printed documentation and included the names of the small zones, their phase and start dates; the Director’s name and contact

information; the host LEA; names and types of schools in each zone; and the key zone priorities and targets.

On receipt of this documentary information, the data were initially recorded in tabular form for ease of reference and comparison of information between the zones. During this process several inconsistencies in the data became apparent to the researcher through his professional knowledge of some of the zones. The documentary information provided by the DfES was then cross-referenced against the database held on the DfES EAZ website\* to check its accuracy. The documentary data provided by the DfES and the data held on their website were not always compatible and both sources of data also contained inaccuracies known to the researcher. These inaccuracies related to aspects of the whole range of baseline information requested and affected the data on over 40 per cent of the zones to some extent. Some of these inaccuracies were due to changes that had taken place in the zones after the initial applications had been submitted to the DfES and the DfES appear to have neglected to update their information, others seem to be due to typographical or 'cut and paste' errors in processing the original data.

These discrepancies in the accuracy and reliability of the baseline data held by the DfES on the small zones had consequences for the design of the questionnaire that was being prepared to collect data from the whole national cohort of the zone directors. A section of the questionnaire would need to be used to collect information on the same data set as that requested from the DfES to enable an accurate database to be established. However, the inaccuracy in some of the DfES contact names and addresses meant that several questionnaires were probably unable to reach their destinations and

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\* A new DfES EAZ website was launched in May 2002 ([www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/eaz/](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/eaz/)), but this still contained some inaccuracies in the data in the section on individual zones on its 'Find a Zone' pages.

therefore not returned, creating some difficulties for the research, as will be described in the next section. A summary of the information gathered on the zones from the DfES and the questionnaire survey is shown in Appendix 4, where each of the zones is given a unique number to identify them, in order to maintain their anonymity. These numbers are used to reference individual zones and director's responses throughout this thesis.

### *Questionnaire Survey*

The relatively small number of small (EiC) Education Action Zones (80) that were in operation at the start of the research in January 2002 meant that it was practicable to use a questionnaire survey to obtain data from the whole cohort, rather than from just a sample of zones. Questionnaires were chosen as the most suitable method of data collection for this national overview of innovation in the zones. It was felt that the use of a questionnaire survey was appropriate for the number of respondents involved, who were widely distributed across the main urban areas of England and because it could be administered relatively quickly and relatively cheaply through the postal system. The use of the whole sample avoided the problems of delineating a sample population, but a good response rate was still necessary for the survey to be representative of the cohort.

The questionnaire was designed to make use of both closed questions to collect the factual information needed to cross-reference and confirm the accuracy of the DfES baseline data, discussed earlier, plus semi-structured open-ended questions (based on the research sub-questions above) to obtain more detailed responses pertaining to the main research question. Consideration was also given in the design of the questionnaire to the potential use of the responses to identify the sample of zones that could be used for follow-up interviews and case studies within the research, as well as the way the data would be analysed.



A draft questionnaire was constructed and a limited pilot of the questionnaire items was undertaken with three zone directors. This resulted in constructive criticism which helped to clarify the questions and reduce any ambiguities identified in the draft. As noted by Wellington (2000):

A postal survey is not interactive, as an interview is, therefore ambiguity, confusion or sheer lack of communication must be removed before the event rather than during it. (p. 105)

Using the feedback from the pilot, the final questionnaire was produced which consisted of two sections (see Appendix 2). Respondents were first presented with a set of non-threatening factual questions, designed to generate an accurate database for the zones from the responses. This was followed by four semi-structured open-ended questions relating to the director's understanding of innovation, the types of innovation introduced or planned for the zones, the impact of these innovations, and the barriers or constraints to the introduction of innovations encountered by the directors. The total length of the questionnaire was limited in order to maintain a clear focus on the main research question and to make the task of responding as straightforward as possible. It was important not to overburden the respondents, in terms of demand or time, in order to try to achieve a high response rate.

The questionnaires were posted to the directors of the 80 small (EiC) Education Action Zones with a covering letter describing the purpose and nature of the research, as well as my position as a fellow zone director (in the hope of eliciting a more empathetic and open response). Although each director was asked to identify themselves and their zone in the questionnaire, so that they could be contacted for follow-up research, the covering letter gave directors an undertaking that all of the information returned would be treated with complete confidentiality and anonymity. The letter also gave prior

notice that some zone directors would be approached for permission to be interviewed and that several zones would be used as case studies for the research at a later date. A stamped, addressed envelope was provided to encourage the respondent's response by the clear return-by date, which was indicated in both the covering letter and on the questionnaire itself.

After a good initial response by the return date (approximately 50 per cent), this was followed by much cajoling by telephone calls, personal emails to some zone directors and a national appeal for returns on the Government's 'eaznet' communication system which links many of the zones. A final number of 50 questionnaires were returned from the 80 zones (see Appendix 4), giving a response rate of just under two-thirds (63 per cent) from the total cohort. Some zone directors also returned useful additional information about their zones along with the completed questionnaires. The design of the questionnaire elicited the type of data anticipated, as will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, and all of the questions were completed in all of the returned questionnaires. The size and nature of the sample of returned questionnaires and the consistency of the responses appeared to indicate that the data were reasonably representative of the whole cohort of small (EiC) Education Action Zones (see Appendix 5). The returned completed questionnaires were from a wide range of zones in terms of start dates and geographical locations, as well as reflecting a cross section of the size of zones and their priorities (see Appendix 4).

However, as noted earlier, it became clear that some questionnaires never reached their destinations due to the inaccurate information provided by the DfES. In some cases this information had the LEA Director of Education or the headteacher of the secondary school in the zone as the contact name and neither the LEA nor the school

administration seemed to be able to clarify who the actual zone director was. In other cases where unreturned questionnaires were investigated, it was found that the named zone director had departed and not been replaced, were on long term sick leave, or they were too busy completing their annual reviews to the DfES and could not manage the time to return the questionnaire. Informal discussions during the course of the research with around 12 of the directors who did not return the questionnaires indicated that their responses would have generally been in line with the findings described in the next chapter.

### *Interviews*

In order to explore some of the issues in more depth, interviews were arranged with 20 of the directors of the small (EiC) Education Action Zones, who had returned the questionnaires. This accounts for a quarter of the total cohort of zones or 40 per cent of the questionnaire respondents. The sample of 20 directors was selected to represent a cross-section of the zones nationally and was based on their zone priorities, the nature of the innovations described in their questionnaire responses, their size and start dates (see Appendix 5).

As already noted, the directors had already been alerted to the possibility of being approached to take part in an interview through the covering letter accompanying the questionnaire. Following the return-by date for the questionnaires, a further letter was sent to the selected directors requesting consent for an interview and to make arrangements for the interviews to take place. A positive and enthusiastic response to be interviewed was received from all of the 20 zone directors selected for the sample. The specific purpose of the interviews was to expand and elaborate on the director's written responses in the questionnaire, to enable them to contextualise their work and

provide richer, more in-depth accounts of innovations in their small (EiC) Action Zones.

A draft interview schedule was designed, based primarily on the same semi-structured open-ended questions that had been used for the questionnaire. The style of the interview questions followed the principle suggested by Kvale (1996) of being dynamic and flexible, in order to generate a positive interaction and natural conversation flow, yet reflective. After a small pilot of the draft schedule with three directors to test responses, the draft was revised and the final schedule was produced (see Appendix 3). A series of sub-questions were devised in the schedule for each of the four main questions to use as prompts were necessary, in order to provide a common structure to the responses. These sub-questions were developed from the responses to main questions in the questionnaire survey. Personal face-to-face interviews with the individual directors of 12 zones took place at times and venues of their choice. During each interview, the interviewer prefaced the introduction of each main question with a brief recap of the interviewee's response to the questionnaire survey in order to provide continuity between the questionnaire and interview data. This recap of prior data, plus knowledge of the interviewer through his professional role as a fellow zone director, enabled a productive rapport to be quickly developed in each interview. This enabled the interviewees to maintain a clear focus on providing detailed responses to the questions. The interviews were all were audio tape-recorded, after agreement with the interviewees, for accuracy and for later transcription into a written record.

The directors of the other eight zones agreed to be interviewed by telephone, due to their more distant locations around the country. The same interview schedule was used and detailed written notes of the responses taken during the interview. Again the

interviews took place after negotiation about specific times that suited the interviewees, when they would be undisturbed for up to the one hour that the process would take. Despite my initial reservations about the use of telephone interviews as a data collection technique, all of the respondents were relaxed, helpful and appeared to give full and frank answers to all of the questions. However some data were inevitably lost during the note-taking process to record the interviews, these notes were subsequently written up as a report of each interview. Therefore the reports of the telephone interviews lack the textual richness of the verbatim transcriptions. In retrospect, it would have been more efficient to make use of a telephone-recording device to overcome this problem, but this equipment was not available to the researcher at the time of the interviews.

All of the interviews lasted between 45 minutes to one hour and used the same interview schedule, although some minor variations in questions developed as a flexible response to the feedback from the questionnaire data or to explore individual circumstances. The interviewees were guaranteed that their responses would be treated as confidential and measures would be taken to ensure anonymity for the directors, their zones and their LEAs.

### *Case Studies*

Purposive sampling was employed to identify five small (EiC) Education Action Zones from the interview group to be selected as case studies (6 per cent of the total cohort or 10 per cent of questionnaire respondents) for the research. This sampling procedure was based on the principle advocated by Silverman (2000) that “purposive sampling allows us to choose a case because it illustrates some feature or process in which we are interested” (p. 104). The five case study zones were not “chosen as ‘typical’ examples

in the sense that typicality is empirically demonstrated” (Bassey, 1999, p.75), the zones were chosen as they illustrated the range and diversity of priorities found nationally such as a focus on ICT, community, transition, staff development and creativity. Also on a more pragmatic note, they were all geographically accessible to the researcher and their directors had expressed an active interest in contributing to the research. The director of each zone was asked at the interview stage for consent to use their zone as a case study and all were in agreement. Again, all of the directors asked if they and their zones could be made anonymous for the purposes of the research, as it allowed them to be more open and honest about some of the issues relating to initiating and stimulating innovation in the zones.

The rationale in using a case study approach as a research strategy (Yin 1994) is that it provides an opportunity to illustrate the contrasting contexts, priorities, innovations and issues operating within and between the zones. As noted by Cohen et al (2000), “contexts are unique and dynamic, hence case studies investigate and report on the complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance” (p.181). The definition of a case study employed by Robson (1993) as “a strategy for doing research which involves contemporary phenomena within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence” (p.146), suggests that the case study approach is appropriate to this aspect of the research.

The use of case studies also enables the research to focus down progressively from data describing the broad national perspective, such as that acquired from the questionnaire survey, to specific in-depth vignettes of stimulating innovation within individual small (EiC) Education Action Zones. Full case studies were not used as the complexity of the zones may have detracted from the focus on their role in stimulating innovation in the

schools. Therefore, the descriptions of innovations in the case study zones in Chapter 7 concentrate on those issues which illustrate and strengthen the findings from the questionnaire responses and interviews.

Data collected from the case study zones were in the form of documentation about the zones, the interview with the zone director, site visits and discussions with teachers working in the zones. The use of observation as a data collection technique was considered, but the range and nature of the innovations in the zones often made it difficult to usefully observe any specific phenomena which would significantly add to the data set in the time available. The site visits generally included visiting the zone secondary school and one primary school, although this was not practicable in every case. The purpose of these visits was to informally elicit further information from the directors and teachers about innovations in the zone. They also provided the researcher with the opportunity to get a more holistic view of each zone and its context. Discussions with teachers took place randomly and opportunistically in the staffroom setting, but this only provided a limited amount of background data based on the variable experience, knowledge and involvement of the teachers in the zone initiatives. The opportunity was also taken during the school visits to observe and note the amount of information and display material about the zone found in each school staffroom and corridors.

Aspects of the data from the case studies are drawn on discretely in Chapter 7, in order to describe the nature and variety of exemplar individual zones to provide a context for the understanding of the challenges facing zone directors in the implementation of innovations in small (EiC) Education Action Zones.

Some of the limitations to the research design have already been discussed in this chapter. In retrospect, formal interviews with headteachers, teachers and pupils may have provided useful alternative viewpoints on the stimulation of innovation in the zone schools from those obtained from the directors. However, the mixed methods approach of the research design adopted did provide the range and type of data anticipated at the outset, in order to reflect on the research questions described earlier. Very few problems were encountered in the data collection process, except for those already discussed resulting from the inaccurate database acquired from the DfES and the limited data obtained from discussions with teachers on site visits.

### *Data Analyses*

Substantial amounts of data were collected for the research through the processes described in the previous sections. The data created were in the form of both quantitative data (from the baseline information and the questionnaires) and qualitative data (from the questionnaires, interviews and case studies). The analyses of these data involved two related processes. Firstly, the data had to be managed and organised to reduce their size and scope and this process is described below. Secondly, the managed set of data produced patterns and themes, which will be described in the next two chapters. These needed to be analysed in relation to the research questions, to draw attention to important or significant points and to provide an understanding and explanations of the findings, also discussed in later chapters of this thesis.

The baseline data obtained from the DfES documentation, DfES EAZ website and from the questionnaire survey returns were tabulated to show the start dates/phase of each zone, the number and type of schools in the zone, and the zone priorities (see Appendix 4). This information was used to provide a descriptive account of the variations



between the zones as part of the contextual background to the study. As noted earlier, some of the data collected from the DfES contained inaccuracies, these were corrected and an accurate database produced for the 50 questionnaires returned. However, it is possible that some inaccuracies in the data in Appendix 4 may still be found for the 30 zones that did not return questionnaires.

The individual responses to the open-ended questions presented in the questionnaire survey were manually coded to create discrete units for analysis. Cohen et al (2000) suggest that “codes define categories; they are astringent, pulling together a wealth of material into some order or structure. They keep words as words, they maintain context specificity” (p.148), therefore this process suited the type of data generated by the qualitative responses resulting from the questionnaire survey. Miles and Huberman (1994) also argue that coding is a process that identifies meaningful data to the researcher and sets the stage for interpreting and drawing conclusions. The categories used for the analysis were not predetermined but emerged from the data themselves through the systematic identification of common themes and responses by the researcher. The use of computer software to assist with the coding process was considered, but it was felt that manual coding was more appropriate for the size of the sample and the nature of the responses.

The written responses to each of the four semi-structured open-ended questions (see Appendix 2) were manually coded and, following a process of reduction and refinement, they were allocated to discrete categories for each question, described below:

Question a) ‘What do you understand by the term ‘innovation’ within the context of EiC Action Zones?’ was coded using the following headings – newness; change; creativity, partnerships, motivation, additionality and flexibility.

Question b) ‘What innovations have been introduced in your zone?’ was coded using the headings – pupil support; partnerships; curriculum; ICT and community.

Question c) ‘What impact have these innovations had (or do you expect to have) on your schools?’ was coded using the headings –improving standards; management and learning; pupil attitudes and parental involvement.

Question d) ‘What are the barriers/constraints to the introduction of innovations within your zone?’ was coded using the headings – organisational resistance; innovation overload; DfES/LEA demands and funding.

The majority of the responses to each individual question contained data that could be allocated to more than one category. For each question there were also a few responses that did not fit easily into the categories indicated above. These anomalies to the general pattern could sometimes be grouped into separate sub-categories, but in other cases were completely individual or idiosyncratic, resulting from extremely local priorities found in some zones. Where relevant, these incongruities will also be reported on and discussed in the following chapters as they reflect the range of innovatory experiences found in the small (EiC) Action Zones.

As the same broad open-ended questions had been used as a basis for the interviews, the transcriptions from the tape-recorded interviews and the written reports from the telephone interviews were coded using the same categories that had been applied to the questionnaire responses, described above. This enabled patterns and interrelationships to be made between the different data sources in order to address the research questions posed earlier. However, the cautionary note made by Coffey and Atkinson (1996) that data reduction is not the main analytical purpose of qualitative coding underpinned the process:

Coding should be thought of as essentially heuristic, providing ways of interacting and thinking about the data. Those processes of reflection are more important ultimately than the precise procedures and representations that are employed (p.30).

In order to test the integrity of the coding process and possible researcher bias, two independent volunteers were provided with samples of data from both the questionnaire responses and the interview transcripts. They were asked to code the sample data using the categories described above, in order to compare their results with that of the researcher. The outcome of this process indicated that the overall allocation of data by the volunteers to the individual categories was consistent with those ascribed by the researcher, indicating that the coding process appeared to be robust.

### *Ethical Issues*

Throughout the research process, there was a need to be cognisant of my professional position and experience as the director of a small (EiC) Education Action Zone. This undoubtedly influenced my choice of research and the direction that it took. However, I was also constantly aware of the need to take an independent and relatively detached approach to the data collection and analysis process, whilst acknowledging that my professional role as a zone director provided me with an inside background and knowledge that would inevitably impinge on the research to some degree. Blaxter et al (2001) note that it is impossible for any researcher to take the dispassionate perspective of an outsider “given the personal commitment any researcher makes to research” (p.220) and this was recognised throughout the research process. I also made a conscious decision not to use my own small zone for one of the case studies as I felt that this might compromise the objectivity of the research to some extent by providing too much opportunity for possible researcher bias. The selection of zones used in the interviews and case studies was essentially based on providing a representative sample

of zones that reflected the national position, based on the data obtained from the documentation and the questionnaire survey.

When seeking informed consent from all of the participants, I always fully explained my position as well as the nature and purpose of the research. My professional position did provide me with access to both information and to other directors more readily than might otherwise have been the case. Many of the directors that I contacted about the questionnaires or the interviews stated that they felt more comfortable (and enjoyed) taking part in the research knowing that I was a colleague as well as a researcher. I felt that this generally resulted in improved access and a much more positive and open response to the issues being addressed.

As noted earlier, all participants in the research were offered the opportunity to remain anonymous and all of the information treated with confidentiality. In the current climate of rigorous accountability and inspection in education, this offer was universally taken up and this again appeared to enable individuals to be open and honest in their responses. Therefore, in this thesis, the identity of directors, zones, schools and LEAs have been made anonymous to respect the wishes of the participants who volunteered to take part in the research. My aim is to report the findings from the research through seminars, meetings and publications to keep all of the participants informed of the outcomes, as well as a wider audience.

### *Chapter Summary*

The research design outlined in this chapter was adopted in order to answer the research questions by taking a mixed methods approach that enabled the initial collection of data at a national scale, through documentary evidence and the questionnaire survey, to identify the broad issues. Then these issues were explored in more depth with a focus on individual zones through the sample of follow-up interviews and case studies.

The findings from this data analysis process, as they related to the work of the small Action Zones and the director's responses to the implementation of innovation are fully discussed in the following two chapters. Detailed use of quotations extracted from the questionnaires and interviews responses are used to convey a flavour of the responses and enable the 'voice' of the directors to be heard.

## Chapter 5

### The Research Findings 1: Small (EiC) Education Action Zones

#### *Background of small (EiC) Education Action Zones*

Following the launch of the Excellence in Cities initiative in March 1999, the first 12 small (EiC) Action Zones came into operation in inner city areas in April 2000. These were followed by increasing numbers of zones (see Appendix 4), starting in subsequent school terms as shown on the table below:

Start dates	Number of Zones Started	Total Number of Zones
April 2000	12	12
September 2000	14	26
January 2001	14	40
April 2001	18	58
September 2001	22	80

**Table 5.1. Start Dates for the small (EiC) Action Zones** (source: DfES)

By September 2001, 80 small (EiC) Action Zones had been given approval to start by the DfES. These zones had notionally been in operation from between four to 20 months at the start of this research in January 2002, as indicated in the DfES data and the factual data gathered from the questionnaires. However, further feedback from both the questionnaires and interviews indicated that many zones did not actually commence operating on the official start date approved by the DfES (shown in Table 5.1). This was primarily due to the zones not appointing directors to manage them until after they had received official written approval to start, thus delaying their actual operational start by up to a term or more in some cases.

The findings from the documentary evidence relating to the whole cohort of 80 zones provided by the DfES (with confirmation of the accuracy of data in the 50 zones which returned questionnaires) indicate that the average size of each small zone is eight schools (one secondary and seven primaries), although this varies considerably between zones (see Appendix 4). The largest zone consists of 19 schools, including three secondary schools (which is almost as large as some of the statutory EAZs), while the smallest zones only have four schools. A small number of zones (nine) include a nursery school and nearly one quarter (18) incorporates a special school within their zone. It is worth noting here that the basic Government funding of £250,000 per annum for the small zones is the same for all of the zones, irrespective of the numbers of schools or numbers of pupils involved within each individual zone.

The primary schools included in the individual zones are usually those that are geographically close to the zone secondary school(s). In most urban areas, this does not automatically mean that they are the main feeder schools to the zone secondary school or necessarily imply that they have particularly close links with their local secondary school. Indeed, the DfEE (1999c) guidance for applications notes that one factor in the grouping of schools in a small EAZ, as one rationale for having a zone, would be the “relatively limited transfer between local primaries and the secondary school” (p.3), in order to build up links and parental confidence in the secondary school. The mechanism for determining which schools should be included in zones was left to the discretion of individual Local Education Authorities. In some LEAs, the Authority identified a secondary school that was perceived to be under-performing and focused the small (EiC) Action Zone around it; in some other areas, clusters of schools from different phases had already been working together and were a natural choice for a zone;

whereas in other LEAs, schools were asked to bid to be involved in the initiative and develop their own partner schools to be included in the zone.

### *Zone Priorities*

The zone schools normally determined the priorities for each zone (annotated in the table in Appendix 4) based on their own collective needs, developed by the constituent headteachers from school self-reviews and internal audits, during the initial application phase for zone approval by the DfEE. Although one director reported that her LEA also had “a lot of influence on the priorities in the action plan” (Zone 52), very few zones indicated that their priorities were directly linked with their Local Education Authority Development Plans. Several directors reported that their zone priorities had been taken directly from, or influenced by, the key issues that had emerged from recent individual zone school inspection reports. However, the priorities also had to take account of the Government agenda of improving standards and complement other national strategies being implemented, such as in literacy and numeracy.

Some general guidance was given by the DfEE on the possible nature of the priorities based on the broad areas of activities that had been promoted in the statutory EAZs (DfEE, 1999c). These activity areas included raising the quality of learning and teaching, pupil and family support, working with business and other organisations, plus making education and other services work together better to tackle social exclusion. However, the DfEE were not prescriptive about these broad areas and the range of priorities found in the small (EiC) Action Zones, indicated in Appendix 4, extends well beyond this guidance in some individual cases, in order to tackle local issues. Following the advice in the DfES guidelines (2001e), the majority of zones have three priorities that are central to raising standards, although a small number have two (10 per cent) and a few others have four (16 per cent).



The main priorities (extrapolated from the zone data, see Appendix 4) and the number of zones they are found in, are summarised in the following table:

Main zone priorities	No.
Raising attainment	41
Transition	28
Community*	26
Attendance/punctuality	18
Inclusion	18
Teaching & Learning (T&L)	16
Information & Communications Technology (ICT)	15
Literacy	9
Achievement	9
Gifted & Talented (G&T)	9
Motivation/self-esteem/behaviour	9
<i>* includes home/school liaison, parents and family learning.</i>	

**Table 5.2: The Main Priorities in the small (EiC) Action Zones**

The nature of these priorities is important in determining the types of innovation that the zones may adopt during their initial three-year lifespan, although most of the priorities are general in character and are therefore very accommodating. For example ‘raising attainment’ generally refers to improving standards in literacy, numeracy and often ICT, across the age range, as judged by improvements in the end of key stage national tests or GCSE results, while ‘achievement’ priority is much broader in its scope, covering a wider range of curriculum subjects; plus improved relative progress, involvement in extra curricula activities, community work, etc. Priorities relating to attendance, punctuality and exclusion commonly revolve around ensuring that pupils are actually in school to benefit from the learning process. ‘Transition’ is usually either linked to improving pupil recruitment into the secondary school and/or improving curriculum continuity between the primary and secondary phases. ICT often refers to improving and updating computer facilities in the zone schools, and ‘community’ frequently relates to various ways of engaging parents more closely in the learning process.

Some zones have very specific pupil target groups and criteria, which their priorities are focused on, such as those described by Zone 31:

- Improve literacy and numeracy levels of attainment for those Year 6 pupils who have the potential to achieve Level 4 at Key Stage 2 SATs, but who would not do so without intervention.
- Extend and refine transition procedures from KS2 to KS3 for the target group.
- Improve GCSE English, Maths and Science grades for the target group in KS4 from predicted grade D/E to grade C or above.

However, this level of specificity is rare amongst the zones and most priorities are generic in character allowing a degree of freedom to propose a range of innovations to address the priorities across all age and ability groupings. As one director noted:

When you have priorities which cover such broad areas as ‘raising attainment’, ‘improving transition’ and ‘inclusion’, then you can basically do anything you want, in terms of trying new things. They are bound to fall into one of those areas (Zone 39).

The majority of the priorities can be placed into three main groupings:

- *Improvement in Standards* – including raising attainment (in end of key stage national tests and GCSE results) and achievement, improved provision for Gifted and Talented pupils, improving the quality of teaching and learning, and improvement in resources such as in ICT.
- *Engagement* – addressing increasing pupil attendance, better punctuality, promoting inclusion, improving self-esteem and confidence, increasing commitment and motivation, community and parental involvement with schools.
- *Transition* – improving transfer from primary to secondary school through school partnerships and curriculum continuity; but also including progression to further education after the end of compulsory schooling.

Outside of these main categories are a small number of localised priorities found in a small number of zones (less than five in each case), such as developing arts education,

improving management or leadership, and catering for mobile pupils who transfer between schools during the course of the school year.

### *Zone Action Plans*

The priorities provide the template for the work of each zone during the whole of its planned three-year existence and for the zone directors they provide the framework within which any innovations can take place. However, during the collection of interview data, it emerged that very few of the directors had been involved in the writing of the original zone application bid and action plan for submission to the DfEE. The applications and plans had been written either by a range of people such as external consultants, LEA inspectors, a group of headteachers from within the zone, or individual headteachers (often the secondary head) from one of the zone schools.

The directors were normally appointed, as noted earlier, after the zone had received official approval to start from the DfEE and often found that little progress had been made on implementing the plans prior to their appointment. This lack of involvement with the initial stages of the development of the zones created some difficulties for several directors, who were then expected to put the plans into practice. This situation was summarised as follows by one director:

...it was crazy inheriting somebody else's plan because it was very hard to monitor budgetarily and it was a bit of a dog's breakfast, as it had so much in it. It was a plan developed in the tranquillity of somebody's home (Zone 32).

These plans had normally been written to meet the requirements of the DfEE guidelines; but as one director notes, the plan that she inherited was:

A very impressive looking document with little substance, sounding good but the reality was completely different (Zone 11).

Another director felt that he was given very little direction about the types of innovations that his zone schools would consider to be appropriate:

Because they (the zone headteachers) had to fight so many political battles to achieve the zone...they hadn't actually had time to come together and reflect on what kind of vision or any reality of what the zone was going to be like  
(Zone 77).

The lack of ownership of the plans by the zone directors also led to many of them undertaking a major re-write of the plans to make them more manageable, while still maintaining a focus on the DfEE approved priorities. As noted by Fullan (2001b), "having innovative ideas and being good at the change process is not the same thing" (p.17). In some cases, the late appointment of directors after the launch of the zone, plus a revision of the plans, occupied most of the first year of the three-year initiative.

Over one quarter of the directors interviewed felt that the secondary schools in their zones would have benefited disproportionately from the original zone plans and they had tried to balance this situation in their revisions. However, many plans were also described as being so vague and open-ended that other directors felt that they were broad enough to allow scope for any new innovations. Another issue that was commented on related to new Government initiatives, such as the extension of EiC into primary schools and the National Key Stage 3 Strategy, encroaching on innovations already implemented by some zones.

#### *From 'small' to 'EiC' Action Zones*

The directors who took part in the interviews were asked whether the change of name in December 2001, from 'small' EAZs to Excellence in Cities (EiC) Action Zones, had any impact on or implications for their work. This change of name was the external manifestation of new operational procedures for small zones, as described in the

revised guidelines (DfES, 2001d). These new procedures were designed to ensure that the zones operated as part of the EiC initiative within each LEA and not independently.

As noted in the guidance:

It is essential that all zones have common overall objectives with the EiC Partnership and that both the zone and the EiC Partnership are clear how the EAZ fits into the wider initiative (DfES, 2001d, p.5).

The range of responses to the question about the change from ‘small’ EAZs to EiC Action Zones reflected the variety of complex organisational arrangements within LEAs that had developed since the inception of the first small zones as part of the broader EiC initiative. Only nine of the 20 directors interviewed reported that they had always regarded themselves and their zones as part of the EiC initiative and had co-ordinated with the work of the other strands of EiC as part of a cohesive LEA structure. The other 11 directors indicated they either had little or no involvement with EiC in their LEA or they had personally proactively developed ad hoc connections with other EiC strand leaders, due to a lack of formal LEA organisation. One director reported his confusion with the EiC arrangements in his LEA as:

We don’t really seem to have an EiC coordinator in the LEA. We have an EiC work related team leader who does everything and that person has a boss, who may be the EiC coordinator, but doesn’t attend any meetings – it’s a strange set-up (Zone 11).

While another director stated that:

He had not seen an LEA adviser in the zone for over a year and we are now on our fourth EiC coordinator (Zone 31).

However, several directors noted that the publication of the new guidelines (ibid) had initiated discussions in their LEA about linking zones to the other EiC strands, while

highlighting potential issues in terms of accountability and ownership of the zones. One director highlighted concerns about the potential change of power relationships resulting from the new guidelines, between the zone management structures, the LEA and the EiC Partnership Board, as:

The headteachers were not happy with the change. A lot of them felt that the purpose (of the zone) was being changed...we became answerable to the EiC Partnership Board instead of the headteachers forum and zone forum. At this point the EiC Partnership doesn't know a lot about the zone (Zone 1).

The importance of the relationship between the zones and their local EiC Partnership Board will soon become critical as it is the Partnership Board that makes the decision about extension for each zone at the end of its initial three-year lifespan (DfES 2002f).

### *Zone Directors*

One unintended outcome of the research was an indication of the variation in the background, status and employment contracts of small (EiC) Action Zone directors. This issue emerged casually in discussions during the interview process and was not part of the original data collection exercise. The DfES guidance (1999c) indicates that non-statutory zones can establish their own management arrangements and suggest that it will not always be necessary to employ the director full-time. The feedback from the directors who were interviewed indicated that they came from a diverse range of professional backgrounds, mainly in education such as ex-headteachers or deputy headteachers of nursery, primary or secondary schools; LEA inspectors, advisors or consultants, while several directors were still employed in middle or senior management positions in the zone secondary school. Many directors felt their previous positions often influenced how some of the zone headteachers and LEA inspectors interacted with them. Depending on the status of their previous background, they

believed this had a positive or negative effect on their work in the zone. For example, the directors who had previously held positions as headteachers generally reported that they were treated as equals by the headteachers in their zones and any new innovations proposed were given serious consideration. Other directors from different backgrounds often suggested that some of the headteachers (especially the secondary headteachers) tried to dominate zone meetings and were frequently dismissive of new ideas proposed by the directors.

However, there were two directors in the interview sample who had not previously worked in education before taking on the position of managing a small (EiC) Action Zone. Both had wide experience in the public services sector and had managed projects linked to community regeneration in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, but both indicated that many of the headteachers they worked with appeared to be disapproving of their non-educational backgrounds and were often dismissive of their ideas. They were also critical of some headteachers competence in chairing meetings, which led to poorly controlled discussions, wasted time and a lack of structure for taking decisions or action. These two directors had tried to initiate innovations related to staff development for leadership and management in their zones, but had been thwarted by the zone headteachers who felt that this type of innovation was unnecessary.

The employment conditions of the directors ranged from part-time to full-time employees, and six of the full-time directors were employed as managers of two small zones within individual LEAs. Some LEAs directly employed directors within their advisory services and structure, while others were employed by the zone schools (notionally on the payroll of the secondary school). These variations and differences in pay and conditions of directors found across the zones added to the complex power

relations that often exist between the zone directors, the headteachers and the LEAs, especially when the directors are trying to promote new innovations.

### *Chapter Summary*

The findings from the research described in this chapter have concentrated on the evidence from the documentation, questionnaires and interviews relating the structures of the small (EiC) Action Zones, their priorities, Action Plans, their relationship with the wider Excellence in Cities initiative and the role of the zone directors. The diverse nature of the zones is illustrated, as is their focus on the local needs of their zone schools. However, the need for the zones to work alongside and within the broader context of the EiC initiative, the LEA and Government initiatives for improvement often leads to conflicting pressures and demands.

The following chapter focuses on the research findings that were directly related to the notion of small (EiC) Action Zones as being vehicles for stimulating innovation within the zone schools.



## Chapter 6

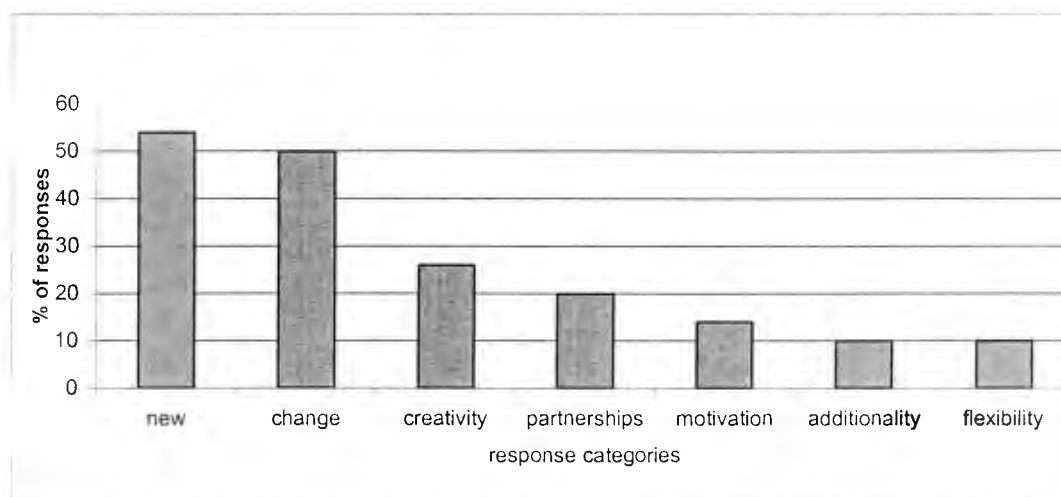
### The Research Findings 2: Stimulating Innovation

#### *The Meaning of Innovation*

As noted in Chapter 1, the concept of innovation lies at the heart of the EAZ initiative and is promoted throughout the Government documentation relating to large and small action zones, as a significant instrument for improvement of standards in schools. However, as previously discussed, the meaning and understanding of the term innovation is not always clear and unambiguous. Therefore, it was essential for this research to establish how the directors of the small (EiC) Action Zones understood and interpreted the term innovation from the perspective of their work.

All of the directors were asked to clarify what they understood by the term ‘innovation’ within the context of small (EiC) Action Zones, as part of the questionnaire survey. The responses received indicated a broad range of understanding, primarily relating to the key terms ‘new’ and ‘change’, in line with the definition of innovation described in Chapter 1. Several directors indicated that they had never really given much thought to the meaning of the term innovation prior to completing the questionnaire. This was often the result of many of the directors inheriting an action plan for their zone, including suggestions for possible innovations, on their appointment and their initial reaction was to simply implement the plans provided. This resulted in many of the responses being relatively unspecific about the director’s understanding or meaning of the term innovation, often providing multiple meanings or substituting short descriptions of innovations that were taking place within the zones as a means of answering the question. However, there was sufficient information accessible from the

open-ended responses in the returned questionnaires to enable the various interpretations of ‘the meaning of innovation’ to be classified into seven broad categories by the researcher: newness; change; creativity, partnerships, motivation, additionality and flexibility, as shown in the table below.



**Table 6.1: The Meaning of Innovation (source: questionnaire responses)**

The ‘newness’ described in over half (54 per cent) of the 50 returned questionnaires related to new approaches, ideas, initiatives, ways of working, opportunities, etc. Many directors indicated in the questionnaire responses that they did not regard innovations as having to be new, per se, but new to the schools in their zones through adopting successful ideas from other areas of education or from non-educational sources. This finding was confirmed by all of the directors interviewed in their response to the question: “do you feel that innovation should be ‘completely new and original’ or just something new to your schools?” As examples of their responses to this question, various directors described innovation as:

Less about re-inventing the wheel and more about implementing strategies which may be new to the schools in the zone (Zone 65).

Something new to the schools, rather than new in the real sense of the word (Zone 11).

Not off-the-wall ideas, but based on the needs of the school (Zone 52).

It is very rare that you can find something completely new, that no-one has ever done anywhere else (Zone 32).

One director described her role in relation to innovation as:

Being like a squirrel, running around looking for kernels of good ideas that could maybe translate into a setting where that good idea has never been tried before (Zone 32).

The concept of 'change' was also mentioned in exactly half of the questionnaire responses from the zones (see Table 6.1), directly or in terms of 'doing things differently', 'transformation' or 'breaking down the barriers'. Several directors regarded the action zone as a catalyst for promoting a culture of change, particularly as it had access to an independent funding stream for trying out new ideas to change practice or for employing extra staff to support pupils. This notion was also reflected in the responses about the additionality (10 per cent) and flexibility (10 per cent) that the zones brought to schools in terms of funding and stimulating change.

Directors often regarded the perceived element of direct risk to the schools as being reduced when the schools took part in zone-initiated activities. This situation was summed up by one director, who understood innovation as:

The opportunity to try things that either haven't been done before or that there hasn't been the energy, enthusiasm or money to put into practice (Zone 64).

A different director felt that "the fact that the EAZs are time limited means that they can take risks with a measure of impunity, but not completely" (Zone 19), while another described this situation as zones needing "to be brave and prepared to fail" (Zone 22), when introducing new innovations into the schools.

A common view expressed about the need for innovation was summarised by one director:

The framework and pressure that schools live under today has taken away the time and the enthusiasm of teachers and schools to try something new, react to the spontaneity of children and use a variety of resources available outside the confines of the education service. EAZs are able to add this dimension to their schools (Zone 15).

This view of the Action Zones being seen as the catalyst for initiating innovations in zone schools or actively stimulating discourse about innovative ways to tackle underachievement is regarded by the directors as fundamental to their work and underpins the additional value that being in a zone brings to the schools.

The responses that connected innovation to creativity (26 per cent) often reflected on what some directors felt to be a relegation of arts and creative subjects within the curriculum (particularly of primary schools) resulting from the Government's recent agenda emphasising Literacy and Numeracy. These directors saw the Action Zones as being an opportunity to reverse this trend, for example:

The zones are able to put back some of the more creative and fun activities that have been lost over the past decade, but with a real focus on adding value and measuring success (Zone 14).

We employed a drama consultant to work with pupils who have never done drama before and her connections led to classes working with the local theatre for performances and it's working really well (Zone 17).

Although the notion of 'partnership' in education may not appear to be innovative, 20 per cent of the cohort reported it to be perceived as a discrete innovation. Although, as noted in the next section, 60 per cent of respondents reported that partnerships were one of the types of innovation that had been introduced into their zones. This discrepancy may have been due to some directors responding to this question by reporting on

innovations that were taking place, rather than on 'the meaning of innovation'. The director's responses from the questionnaires indicated that the partnerships that had developed between the primary and schools in their zones were a new form of collaboration and interaction, stimulated by the existence of the zones, which would not have occurred if the zones had not existed. This emphasis on the importance of schools working together, as a new innovation, is reported on in more detail later in this chapter.

The directors who felt that innovation equated in some way to 'motivation' (14 per cent) related this to pupil motivation, in terms of experimentation to make schools more interesting and enjoyable, for those pupils who had become disengaged with the learning process. Some responses were also concerned with teacher motivation and felt that the zones could provide teachers with additional opportunities to try new things or participate in professional development, which may not have been afforded otherwise.

The sample of directors interviewed were also asked to comment on whether they felt that they had been given enough guidance or direction from the DfES about the Government's expectations or understanding of innovation. The response to this question was an unequivocally and emphatically negative one from all of the interviewees, however many respondents suggested that the lack of guidance could be viewed as a positive opportunity for the zones to experiment. For example:

I didn't want it (guidance). I wanted innovations that were based on the needs of the schools (Zone 50).

Had we been given guidance by the DfES, it would have been formalised, civil service tried and trusted mechanisms, which have had a measure of success somewhere else. I would rather not have had it, I don't think that we could have done what we have done here, had the DfES given us a format to work with (Zone 19).

I think that the lack of guidance from the DfES was a bonus in that it allowed us to organise things around the needs of the pupils (Zone 18).

Other directors felt that the lack of guidance on innovation resulted from the DfES not knowing what it was or not wanting to be prescriptive:

Innovation is one of those words that can be interpreted in so many ways by so many people. I don't actually think that the DfES knew what they meant by it (Zone 1).

There was just this word that was bandied about, this innovation, but they didn't give us a clue what they wanted (Zone 11).

I think that they didn't want to tie everyone down to one set sort of model, they wanted to give people the freedom to explore and to be creative (Zone 20).

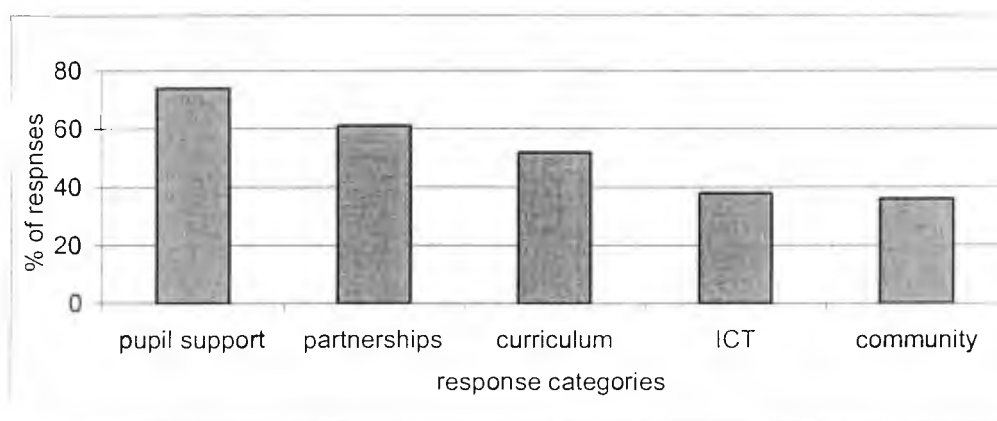
In fact, any conversations that I have had with the DfES have been veering towards them suggesting not trying anything new at all, because it mucks up your targets (Zone 64).

The diverse findings derived from the questionnaire and interview data on the meaning of innovation in the context of small (EiC) Action Zones reflects the ambiguity about the concept of innovation found generally within education, as described in Chapter 1. The consequences of this uncertainty for the work of the small (EiC) Action Zones in stimulating innovation will be discussed in the concluding chapter.

### *Types of Innovation*

Small (EiC) Action Zone directors were asked to report on the types of innovation that had been introduced, or planned to introduce, into their zones. All of the directors indicated that they had initiated more than one innovation in their zone and each individual innovation described by the directors in their responses was allocated to one of five main categories: pupil support; partnerships; curriculum; ICT and community, (as shown in Table 6.2).

In the interviews with the directors, the individual questionnaire responses were followed-up with more searching questions concerning the origins of the innovations adopted by their zones and whether they would have taken place in the absence of the zone.



**Figure 6.2: Types of Innovation** (source: questionnaire responses)

Over 70 per cent of the directors who responded to the questionnaire reported that they had initiated innovations that provided extra support for pupils' learning. This support was often in the terms of the zone directly employing additional learning mentors and classroom assistants to work with specific children who were judged to be need of greater individual support in order to improve. The provision of learning mentors is one of the other strands of the Excellence in Cities initiative, which in most LEAs is aimed at the secondary phase of schooling. Many of the small zones (24 per cent) reported that they had used their funding to extend this provision into their primary schools, often employing mentors who would work between zone schools and in some instances continue to support the same pupils when they have transferred to the zone secondary school. Several zones also operated transition summer schools, staffed by learning mentors, primary and secondary teachers to provide continuity between the phases and to raise the attainment of targeted groups of pupils. Examples of other areas of pupil support provided by the small (EiC) Action Zones included the funding of additional

Education Welfare Officer time and School/Home liaison workers to improve attendance; behaviour therapists to work with children displaying challenging behaviour and trained midday assistants who could provide educational play experiences for the children during lunchtimes.

The community category in the data in Table 6.2 includes zone innovations that have employed additional workers to specifically link with parents to provide support, plus family learning schemes and courses for parents, to enable them to engage more fully in the education process. Although this is an indirect form of pupil support, it was felt that there were sufficient responses reflecting the focus of work in some zones on local community and families, outside of the school's context, to merit a separate coding. None of the directors reported that they had formally linked up with other external agencies to provide this type of support, although several alluded to trying to establish and develop these multi-agency links in the future.

Many directors (over 60 per cent of respondents) regarded the creation of partnerships between zone schools as fundamental to the work of their zone. The responses indicated that partnerships had developed between the primary and secondary schools, and between the different primary schools, that did not exist prior to the establishment of the zone. One consequence of the headteachers initially meeting together to develop the zone action plan had been to stimulate these partnerships. They were then embedded through teachers sharing good practice, cross-phase staff training, staff visits to other zone schools, whole zone projects and in one instance the creation of a zone-wide pupil council (Zone 34). Many of these developments were linked to improving the transition of pupils between primary and secondary school, particularly in terms of pupil records, curriculum continuity and teaching styles. Some directors indicated that



joint zone events and performances had strengthened the concept of schools being part of a zone. Others felt that the small scale of the zone had enabled them to promote new extra-curricular activities accessible to all of the zone pupils, which would have not been viable in the individual schools because of the insufficient numbers of potential participants attending each school. Only two zones (37 and 79) indicated that they had initiated partnerships with business partners, although neither zone elaborated on the details of these links or their innovations.

The curriculum innovations indicated in just over half of the returned questionnaires from the zones were mainly within the area of enriching the creative arts, including funding for schools using the services of artists and poets in residence, instrumental music teachers, visiting drama and theatre groups. These activities enabled the schools to provide additional skills and experiences for the pupils over and above their normal curriculum offer. Eight directors reported that they had initiated work on 'thinking skills' or 'accelerated learning' within their zones, as a way of offering teachers and pupils the opportunity to review their teaching and learning styles, in order to raise attainment and improve standards. A small number of individual directors also indicated that they had supported developments such as the promotion of vocational courses in Key Stage 4, the teaching of modern foreign languages in Key Stage 2 and residential educational experience for pupils, through the funding available from the Action Zone.

Although Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is part of the school curriculum, it was treated as a separate category for this research due to the nature of the innovations described in the questionnaire feedback. The ICT responses received were mainly about improving resources, including the provision of interactive

whiteboard technology, shared ICT technical support between the zone schools and increasing the numbers of computers in schools. One zone (Zone 19) had linked together the ICT network across all of its schools using a laser connection, reported to be unique in the English education system, as an example of an original innovation. However, as noted by Kington et al (2002), “it is not necessarily the technology that has to be innovative, but the approach to teaching and learning must be”. In a small minority of zones, the provision of improved ICT resources for the schools appeared to be the main focus of the zone activity and its financial outlay, irrespective of the declared priorities in their zone action plan. When asked about this in the interview, one director (Zone 19) explained how he regarded ICT as the delivery mechanism for his three zone priorities and that was how he had been directed to work by the zone headteachers.

### *Stimulus for Innovation*

The interviewees indicated that stimulus for the types of innovations their zones initiated, had mainly come from the zone headteachers, sometimes from individual teachers and in several cases directly from the zone director themselves as they attempted to implement the action plan. In most zones, the headteacher management groups also made the major decisions about which innovations to adopt, before instructing the zone director to implement the innovation in the schools.

The sample of directors interviewed were unanimous in their responses that none of the innovations stimulated by the zones would have taken place in their schools, at that point in time, in the absence of a zone. Typical responses included:

All of the zone activities and staff are additional, schools wouldn't have been able to afford them without the zone (Zone 31).

These things (innovations) may have happened anyway in time, but the zone speeded them up and gave them structure (Zone 77).

However, the vast majority of directors who were interviewed (18 out of 20) thought that initial driving force behind the schools and their headteachers wanting to be included in a small (EiC) Action Zone, was primarily the prospect of accessing extra funding as opposed to the opportunity to be innovative or try out new ideas. For example, characteristic responses to this question about why schools initially wanted to be incorporated into the zone included:

The schools were chasing the funding – nothing else (Zone 52).

Extra funding – no doubt about it (Zone 69).

They wanted the money – definitely (Zone 64).

I would be lying if I didn't say that the LEA and the schools were looking to tap into new sources of money (Zone 1).

Although, in some cases, this view had altered during the life of the zone as indicated in the responses of the following directors:

To begin with they (the headteachers) loved the money, but now they understand more about innovation (Zone 11).

The heads eyes light up when they hear about extra money, but now they also light up because they can see the opportunities that the money represents (Zone 60).

Funding originally, but other schools outside of the zone have benefited from other forms of EiC funding, so the zone schools have gradually come on board in terms of trying new ideas (Zone 62).

Money was the enticement, but now schools have started to appreciate the opportunity to innovate (Zone 31).

These findings about the initial importance of additional funding and resources for schools concur with those for other Excellence in Cities strands, as reported by the NFER/LSE/IFS consortium evaluating the project (Stoney et al, 2002). The emphasis on the zones being about generating extra income for schools as opposed to the opportunity to try out new ideas and innovations, especially by the headteachers of the schools, has ramifications for the sustainability of zone activities and their long term impact, as will be described in the next section of this chapter.

### *Impact on Schools*

The questionnaire survey asked all of the directors of small (EiC) Action Zones about the degree of impact that the innovations that they had introduced into their zones had had on their schools. In anticipation that the response from some directors might be that they had not yet had time to assess the impact, they were also asked about the anticipated impact of their planned innovations. Many of the responses did signify that the zones had not been in operation long enough to determine the full extent of the impact of any innovations. This type of unspecific response came equally from the directors of newer zones and from those that had been formally in existence for nearly two years. Several directors also indicated that they did not expect to see any impact from their work until the end of the three-year initiative at the earliest. However, at the time of the research, half of the zones had been in operation for at least one year and therefore would have been required to submit an annual review of their progress to the DfES, part of which would need to include “the impact that the zone has made over the past year” (DfES, 2001e, p.2). There appeared to have been some hesitancy to report this progress in the questionnaire responses, possibly because the short-term impact had not been significant. This tension between the need to demonstrate short-term impact for the DfES and to embed long-term changes in the schools is described further in a

later section of this chapter. One impact anticipated by the DfEE (1999c) was improved recruitment to the zone secondary school from the zone primaries and this underpinned many of the innovations focused on pupils at Key Stage 2 to 3 transfer.

Another issue affecting the impact of innovations, which emerged from the interviews with the sample group of directors, was the large turnover of headteachers in the zone schools and changes to the structure of the schools, since the establishment of the zones. This situation is typical of many inner city areas and especially in schools facing challenging circumstances. However, over a third of the directors interviewed raised this issue as an impediment to implementing innovations. Examples of responses included:

Three of the schools share a large single site and are amalgamating in September, this has caused a lot of upset, changes in the headteachers and a virtual opt-out of zone activities (Zone 69).

Five out of the eight (headteachers) are new in the last 18 months, that is not an ideal circumstance for innovation because you need to feel quite secure in your basic position in your school to bring about change (Zone 32).

The people who had the input into the plan at the beginning are no longer there, all of the headteachers have changed, including now the secondary head. When April comes I will be working with my ninth headteacher out of five schools (Zone 20).

This situation of high headteacher turnover is not unexpected in the schools in inner city areas of disadvantage, where the zones are found. However, it can have a major bearing on the work and effectiveness of the zones, as new headteachers may have different priorities for their schools and also need time to engage with the work of the zone. In some of the zones these changes had a negative effect on the impetus of the zone, as two of the directors noted:

The new headteachers have had so much on their plates with their new schools and Ofsted etc. that they have not been able to work with the zone as much as I would have liked – they have been so pre-occupied with the day job, that the EAZ has been a low priority to them (Zone 11).

For new heads coming into challenging schools, being part of an action zone is not necessarily high on their priority list (Zone 1).

However, several directors also commented that some of the new headteachers were more committed to and enthusiastic about the zones than their predecessors, because the new heads saw the zone as a positive vehicle for change in their new school. Therefore changes in headteachers within zones could be regarded as a positive or negative development, depending on the individuals involved.

The feedback about the actual or potential impact of zone innovations described in the questionnaire responses were categorised into four main areas: improving standards; management and learning; pupil attitudes and parental involvement.

The impact of zone innovations on improving standards was generally expressed in terms of improving pupil (and school) attainment levels, especially in the end of Key Stage 2 and 3 national tests, and in GCSE results. The high proportion of directors (76 per cent) describing ‘improving standards’ as a major anticipated or actual quantifiable impact of the zone on its schools in the questionnaire responses, reflects the influence of the DfES guidelines (2001e) on zones, which emphasise that:

You are therefore expected to set, and achieve, more challenging targets than would otherwise have been set, reflecting the additional investment of resources and expertise into the zone and these ...should include some specific targets for raising standards of attainment e.g. improved KS2, KS3 and GCSE results...at zone and school level (p.10).

The impact of the zones on management and learning reflects the innovatory work on partnerships developed between the schools, diversifying teaching and the curriculum,

improved ICT resources etc., as described earlier in this chapter. The evidence for the impact of some of these activities, such as increasing the numbers of computers in schools, can be easily demonstrated. However, the evidence for the impact of other activities is less tangible and more subjective when described in the responses:

Encouraging staff to remember why they came into the job in the first place!  
(Zone 14).

Developing a culture of sharing and collaboration, as opposed to competition, between schools (Zone 7).

The greatest impact so far has been on the teachers in the schools. Their interest and support to become involved has been brilliant. They are giving the initiatives that extra push that will in the long run see attainment rise (Zone 15).

The excitement generated by collaborative planning is infectious! (Zone 36).

The findings indicate that the impact of the zone innovations on pupils' attitudes to school is also difficult to assess in many areas. Any overall improvements in areas such as attendance and punctuality or reductions in exclusions can be quantified and demonstrated. However, the impact of innovations to engender improvements in pupil and/or staff self-esteem, enthusiasm, motivation, commitment, fun and excitement, pride and confidence, which are a major part of the work of many of the zones, can often be difficult to judge through qualitative measures. It is also often challenging to demonstrate positive changes in any meaningful way within the three-year lifetime of the zones. Similarly, the increased parental involvement with schools, that many zones are working to achieve, can be measured to some extent through indicators such as improved attendance rates at parent meetings. Again, it is difficult to assess the impact of improvements in parental attitudes to learning, community perceptions of schools or raising parent's self-esteem that some zones have programmes to develop.

The interviews with the directors were used to elaborate on the individual responses about the impact of innovations in the questionnaire survey. Following the statement in the DFEE guidance (1999c) that there should be “an equal partnership between all of the participating schools (in the zone), with the programmes reflecting the issues which affect all schools” (p.3), all of the interviewees were asked whether the impact of zone activities had been equal across all of their schools. This question produced a variety of responses, which ranged from some zones attempting to equally address issues across all of their schools, for example:

Everything we have done at this moment has been zone wide, apart from the things that particularly relate to the secondary (Zone 64).

It is equal across all of the schools, but you don't have equal schools (Zone 10).

Some directors indicated that they targeted groups of pupils in the zone who needed additional support rather than schools. Although the difficulty of attempting to achieve equality between the schools in the zones is reflected in the following two contrasting statements:

I haven't targeted the weaker schools or schools in special measures, because the LEA throws a lot of money at those schools (Zone 32).

There are two or three schools which do not really need extra resources from the zone as they already get excellent results (Zone 31).

The responses of other directors related the effectiveness of the impact of innovations they have tried to implement on the quality of the management of individual schools:

The impact has not been equal, but not because the EAZ hasn't wanted it to be, but because the schools have prevented it (Zone 20).

The impact hasn't been equal, in the main, it's related to the overall awareness and vision of the heads (Zone 19).



There is a critical competency about management and if that critical competency is upset then I could throw the best project in the world into the school and I don't think that it would have much impact. We have one school which is tremendously enthusiastic, but the head couldn't manage his way out of a paper bag (Zone 32).

The interviewees were also questioned about how directors could measure the impact of zone innovations discretely from the influence of other initiatives taking place. Many respondents admitted that measurement and evaluation of the specific impact of their work was a major weakness. They also generally felt that the DfES have a short-term expectation of the impact of the zones and concentrated too heavily on end of key stage national tests and GCSE results, as an indicator of success. The common response to this question about measuring impact was that it was generally agreed that it was difficult to extrapolate the success of the zone activities independently from other influences:

I can't measure the impact of the EAZ compared to other initiatives because I don't know what other things are happening (Zone 20).

The majority of respondents indicated that they had instigated measures specifically to evaluate activities that the zone had initiated, to demonstrate the 'additionality' or 'added value' of their work. However, most directors indicated that they would readily claim the responsibility for almost any improvements that had occurred in schools their zone, even if they could not always justify them in terms of the zone innovations.

Some directors highlighted the long-term nature of their innovations, which would probably not necessarily have any substantial impact on pupils or schools during the initial three-year lifetime of the zone:

Much of our work is targeting the early years and foundation stages to make a long term difference to their quality of education (Zone 69).

Another director described the work in her zone on raising the aspirations of pupils, which may not make a difference until they are adults:

The investment we have put in to raise aspirations will have an effect that we can't measure or we may never know (Zone 10).

Others described the problems of measuring some of the innovations designed to improve the affective aspects of a pupil's education experience, for example:

The soft targets, like self-esteem and confidence are really difficult to analyse, statistics can be used to show anything you want them to (Zone 11).

Their (the pupil's) self-esteem and confidence may have risen, but how do you measure that and what impact might that have on their results (Zone 20).

The final part of the question on the impact of innovations in small (EiC) Action Zones, related to the sustainability of the work of the zones and the legacy that would be left after they had finished. This question arose from the professional experience of other initiatives in education by the researcher and in response to the following statement in the DfES guidance (2001e):

It is important that targets set at zone and school level, as with zone activities, reflect a built-in rather than 'bolt-on approach'. Activities and targets that exhibit a bolt-on mentality (i.e. those that are not incorporated into the wider school planning process) are unlikely to be sustainable (in either themselves or the benefits they bring) once the zone funding has ceased (p.11).

One zone director expressed similar reservations to the DfES about sustainability:

I would hope that the zone didn't suffer from what I call the 'elastic band syndrome', when the schools are stretched while they are in the zone but as soon as it finishes they rebound back to where they were at the start (Zone 52).

Several zones, which had invested heavily in funding additional learning mentors or classroom assistants, also recognised the difficulty of individual schools continuing to maintain these approaches at the same scale in the future:

I think that it will be difficult to sustain the work in the long term because of the reliance on staff. There is a real fear about what happens after three years when the zone officially finishes (Zone 31).

The zones that had invested heavily in ICT resources also recognised that the funding would not be available in the future for upgrading the systems as new technologies evolved. Several directors expressed a hope that the creation of a basic ICT infrastructure by the zone would alert the schools to the potential of ICT for improving teaching and learning and this would provide the momentum for future developments.

Over two thirds of the interviewees felt that the partnerships that had developed between schools as a result of their involvement in the Action Zone would continue and develop after the zone had ceased to exist. For example, responses about the legacy of the zone included:

I would expect the community features of the work, the partnership between the schools to continue (Zone 32).

I would hope to see greater cooperation between professionals and a learning community (Zone 20).

I hope that the work between colleagues won't just stop and would be something the schools pick up and carry on (Zone 10).

Schools working together – that has made a huge difference (Zone 17).

Perhaps surprisingly, only one director indicated that the innovations promoted in the zone had been incorporated into the LEA's Education Development Plan and therefore

a formal mechanism existed for sustaining the zone developments. Although this was also followed by a note of caution about the reality of this situation:

What I find is that there aren't many people in the rest of the LEA who understand to the same extent, what we are doing. They don't have the background knowledge at the moment. Unless they take time to find out, then they will still be scratching the surface when we finish (Zone 1).

The overall pattern of findings on the impact of innovations in the small (EiC) Action Zones described in this section indicates the difficulties of discretely identifying the impact of zone innovations independently from the plethora of other initiatives that schools are involved in. They also highlight the potential problems of using the zones simply as a form of additional funding and setting up activities that schools will have difficulties sustaining after the zone has finished. Whereas, as noted by the DfES above, the zones were introduced as a short-term opportunity to try out innovations which could then be integrated into the work of schools, if they were successful in raising achievement.

### *Barriers and Constraints*

The final issue that zone directors were asked to comment on, in both the questionnaire survey and the interviews, concerned the barriers or constraints that they had encountered while trying to introduce new innovations into their zones. Only one of the questionnaires was returned with an indication that the director had encountered no problems, in many other questionnaires the responses to this question were extensive and wide ranging. In the interviews, this question also produced some of the most passionate responses, which seemed to stem from a frustration felt by many directors that their personal enthusiasm for initiating innovation in their zones was being restricted by a whole range of obstacles.

The open-ended responses, which often contained descriptions of multiple barriers and constraints described by individual zones, were grouped into four main categories: organisational resistance; innovation overload; DfES/LEA demands and funding.

The difficulties that directors highlighted under the category of 'organisational resistance' could be divided into two strands. Firstly, just under half of the responses in this category related to negative attitudes towards innovation that the directors felt that they had encountered in the zone schools, particularly emanating from headteachers. For example:

The narrow perspectives of some headteachers, unable to think 'out of the box'. Conservative in approach and reluctant to try anything new (Zone36).

(The headteacher's) perception (is) that innovations are 'froth' and we should be doing 'real' work with children (Zone 54).

Two heads in the zone are fully committed, but the others are either resistant and passive, or apathetic and unresponsive (Zone 69).

Some of this resistance appeared to be due to some schools having been placed into a small (EiC) Action Zone by their LEA without any consultation, or the difficulty for some headteachers having to operate in a spirit of cooperation and partnership, rather than competition and rivalry. A few directors suggested that the apparent resistance might have been a reflection of the 'power struggle' that some heads were engaged in between other headteachers in the zone or in their relationship with the zone director. A number of directors described their schools as having an 'inward looking culture', as portrayed in the following responses:

I have found them very defensive, very cautious, and on top of that some individual headteachers (who are the gatekeepers) keep their gates shut so tight that you can hardly get in (Zone 20).

In the absence of leadership at a strategic level, schools have been used to working independently of the LEA and often on their own. As a result, schools and their teachers do not willingly embrace the concept of partnership, and networking between teachers and across schools has been difficult (Zone 38).

Interestingly two of the zone directors who did not have a school teaching background, made comparable comments to try to explain this introverted culture:

As someone who has not worked in the schools aspect of education before, I have found working with headteachers frustrating due to the narrowness of their experience (Zone 31).

The downside of my non-educational background is that I try to get schools to think differently, but they seem to be set in their ways and unresponsive to me – especially some heads (Zone 52).

Several directors commented that the headteachers in their zones had indicated that they were personally receptive to change, but often suggested that staff in their schools were more resistant. Some of the heads reported that their staff perceived any innovation as creating more work and some directors described their role as having to ‘sell’ innovations to staff in schools to get them on board. However, this may have been a deflection tactic deployed by some headteachers who were not fully committed to the zone, but did not want to appear as such in front of their peers. One director also noted that the Chief Inspector of her LEA now chaired her zone management committee, which had not only changed the atmosphere (to become more serious), but had also led to a situation where the headteachers often acquiesced, during the meetings, to the Chief Inspector’s suggestions to try new innovations. However, on return to their schools, the headteachers rarely made any attempt to initiate any of the innovations agreed at the meetings (Zone 11).

The second group of responses allocated to the category of ‘organisational resistance’ related to practical problems faced by directors, which they felt that the schools were

using as barriers (consciously or unconsciously) to obstruct innovations developing within the zone. These practical problems included getting teachers out of their classrooms for courses or meetings, difficulty in the employment of supply teachers by schools, poor communication between the schools and directors, and the inflexibility of timetables in secondary schools. These barriers were compounded when zone activities were planned to operate across several schools at once, as schools develop a degree of inertia, which is difficult for an external agency (such as a zone director) to penetrate or break down. A comment from one director summarised this attitude towards implementing the work of her zone as “resistance from some schools to having their routine disrupted” (Zone 54).

The category labelled ‘innovation overload’ includes responses describing the difficulties that zone directors have encountered when trying to introduce new innovations within a school climate often perceived to be constantly inundated with new Government initiatives, plus the time needed to implement any new undertakings and potential risks involved. Over a quarter of the questionnaire respondents mentioned initiative overload as being a constraint on attempts to introduce new innovations in their zones. For example:

The introduction of initiative after initiative within educational circles has diminished the enthusiasm of some schools. A lot of work has had to be undertaken to engage schools in the possibilities that the zone has to offer (Zone 52).

(We have) variable responses from schools regarding handling innovation within the schools itself and the balance of innovation overload between the EAZ projects and those currently underway in the schools themselves (Zone 59).

However, one director took a more pro-active view of the role of the action zone:

I think that, in a way, we are here to overload them (schools) or put a bit of pressure on them. EAZs are always in areas which are tough nuts to crack, in an educational sense, otherwise we wouldn’t be here (Zone 19).

Many of the reported concerns about the DfES demands on the small (EiC) Action Zones, which were regarded as constraints or barriers to innovation, emanated from the perceived expectation of year on year improvements in end of key stage national test and GCSE results, to be reported in annual zone reviews to the DfES. It was felt that the expectation for an immediate impact on these results in zone schools was over ambitious and not enough value was being given to innovatory projects which would result in improvement in the longer term.

My biggest frustration is that the DfES have an obsession with numerical targets, which is at odds with their apparent agenda of innovation – we are looking at other ways of measuring success (Zone 64).

The DfES have got a very short-term expectation of the impact you can have (Zone 17).

The barriers are the DfES, who are expecting significant results immediately. They do not appear to be willing to accept that individual areas may have their own problems and that if we are to see lasting success, it will take time for initiatives to take root (Zone 15).

It is difficult to say that we are going to be innovative and do different things if the DfES are actually saying that the only measure of achievement is going to be through SATs results and the only way that they are interested in those is if they go up by the percentage that they expect each year (Zone 64).

I think that the notion of tangible year on year improvement in an area like this, with high pupil mobility, high teacher turnover and lack of continuity, is very difficult (Zone 19).

Several other directors felt that the planned three-year life of the zones, initially proposed by the DfES, placed a constraint on approaches to innovation. As one director reported:

I think that the (DfES) expectation of what you can achieve is unrealistic. No project, initiative or innovation is going to make a huge difference in three years. Hopefully if you get a two year extension, then you stand more chance of doing something lasting (Zone 1).



The constraints of the initial three-year lifespan of the small zones were further compounded by the requirement to seek approval for continuation of zone funding from the DfES at the end of the first year of operation and annually from the local EiC Partnership Board thereafter. This effectively meant that all zone planning for innovation was very short-term, which placed a severe restriction on what could be achieved. Ironically several directors who did not complete the research questionnaires subsequently informed me that they were too busy writing their first annual review and revised action plan for the DfES, at the time that they received the questionnaire, to make a response. After the first year (assuming that DfES approval to continue is granted), each small zone is then required to undergo annual review process undertaken by the local Excellence in Cities Partnership Board, in order get approval to continue the work of the zone. The timing of these annual reviews also created some problems as they occurred in September, January or April, depending on the start date for the zone. The difficulties arose through the mismatch with either the school or the financial year, for some zones, which led to difficulties in planning for continuity.

While other respondents indicated that they were pleased that the DfES had eventually produced specific guidelines (DfES, 2001e) for the small zones, there were still some concerns voiced:

The DfES are getting better, I could not believe the new guidelines for the action plan this year compared to last year, which was two pieces of A4 paper. We used to get these things for large EAZs, but they were irrelevant for what I was doing. The DfES seem to change staff and roles so often that you don't know who you are working with (Zone 11).

The issues relating to LEA barriers were on a far smaller scale and more localised in context. They often revolved around lack of communication between the LEA and zone directors. This was especially true in connection with decisions taken by the LEA that

directly affected zone schools, such as closure in several cases, without consideration of the broader implications for the zone. Some directors interpreted the changes in the accountability procedures for zones, as a result of the new DfES (2001e) guidelines produced immediately prior to the start of this research, as a potential new constraint to implementing innovations. By making the LEA EiC Partnership Board into the body which the zones reported after their first year, directors felt that the LEA would ‘hijack’ the agenda of the zones to conform with their own plans and targets for school improvement.

The fourth category into which responses to the question about the constraints and barriers to the introduction of innovations into small (EiC) Action Zones were allocated focused on ‘funding’. The main concern indicated by the director’s responses was about the raising of up to £50,000 of funding per annum through private sponsorship, which would be matched pound for pound by the DfES. This concept of private investment in the small zones mirrored, on a smaller scale, one of the fundamental principles behind the funding of the statutory EAZs. Although there was no indication in the questionnaire responses of any objection to zones being partially funded through this mechanism, it was seen as a constraint to the operation of some zones. Some of these constraints were initially due to poor advice being given to the directors about how to claim this matched funding. For example:

We now get the matched funding, but only after originally getting very poor advice from the DfES about claiming for ‘in kind’ support such as volunteers (Zone 50).

We get very little cash and it wasn’t until I was given advice by the TCT (Technology College Trust) that I found out how to tap into all of the possibilities for ‘in kind’ support which could be claimed for (Zone 62).

When asked to elaborate in their interviews on the difficulties that some of the zone directors had had with getting sponsorship for their zones, several highlighted the problems:

With the private sponsorship we are scraping the barrel to get it and its mainly in kind, such as volunteers. The system is completely ridiculous, it only works well in an area where there is big business...This area has seven shops, all family businesses and nothing else! It's a bit of a lost cause (Zone 64).

This area does not have the sort of businesses that can sustain that type of sponsorship, they just aren't there. It's probably one of the most difficult things that I have found (with the job) (Zone 1).

I approve of the idea that once you have got sponsorship, you can get matched funding. I am not against that, but I would like to have more funding without having to scrape for it – I haven't chased around after it (Zone 60).

A number of directors interviewed felt that, partly because of the part-time nature of their work, they could not devote enough time to finding sponsors, while others did not feel that they had the training or experience to raise funds from external sources. Some of these directors had resorted to planning activities only within the standard annual budget of £250,000, available to all zones and considered any extra to be a bonus. They had virtually abandoned trying to attract sponsorship/matched funding, as not being a cost effective use of their time or expertise, in order to concentrate on working with pupils and teachers on innovations to improve standards. One director felt that:

There is not enough director's time to do this and the DfES basic funding cannot justify paying someone to fund raise (Zone 31).

Another issue that emerged concerning funding revolved around the plethora of different Government funding streams, such as Excellence in Cities, the New Opportunities Fund (NOF), Creative Partnerships or a Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) etc., as well as funding from charities, that have become directly accessible to

many inner city schools in recent years. One of the directors interviewed noted that this had led to confusion amongst schools and inequalities in provision:

The lack of an overall LEA strategy has resulted in different groups of schools benefiting from different funding initiatives without clear criteria for selection (Zone 38).

Some directors reported that schools within their zones were denied access to other sources of external funding by their LEAs (even for other EiC strands) because they were part of an Action Zone, even though they qualified for it in terms of their statistical indices. This was regarded as being severely detrimental financially to the individual schools involved, as the additional zone funding per school was relatively small compared to the funding from some other initiatives. Several other directors noted the difficulties of attempting to be equitable with the zone funding across all of their schools. For example:

There are variants in the size and operation of the schools and this makes it difficult to make sure that every school is getting a fair share of the zone (Zone 11).

Although the directors were passionate in their responses to this question, the barriers and constraints described above were generally regarded as 'minor irritations', which were felt by many of the directors to have been time consuming, hindered the implementation of innovations in their zones or restrained the scope of their innovations, but had not prevented the zones from trying to achieve their overall priorities. During the interviews, many directors of well-established zones noted that it was ironic how they felt that they had overcome most of the barriers and constraints just as their zone was coming to the end of its three-year life.

### *Chapter Summary*

The findings from the research have been described in this chapter at some length, in order to provide a detailed account of the responses to the questionnaire survey and interviews conducted with small (EiC) Zone directors. The main findings indicate that, amongst other things:

- There is uncertainty about the meaning of innovation amongst zone directors, although most understand it to relate to introducing something new or the concept of change.
- Most of the zone innovations introduced are not new to education, but are new within the context of the zone and its schools.
- The types of innovations initiated in the zones are limited in their scope.
- Active partnerships between zone schools are regarded as one of the most positive outcomes found in the small (EiC) Action Zones so far.
- The zones have not been in operation long enough to fully assess the impact of any innovations that have been implemented.
- The zone directors have encountered a variety of barriers and constraints to the implementation of innovations.
- There is a conflict between the demands for short-term improvements in pupil assessment at the end of Key Stages and innovations planned to have an impact on improving standards over a longer period.

The following chapter provides case study descriptions of five small (EiC) Action Zones with different priorities, which illustrate many of these issues in a real world context. The implications of these findings for addressing the research questions, as described in Chapters 1 and 4, will be fully discussed in the final chapter of this thesis.

## **Chapter 7**

### **The Case Studies**

Five small (EiC) Action Zones were selected, from the 80 zones in the cohort, to be used as case studies for the research. These zones were selected because, between them, they demonstrate a broad range of the priorities and issues found across all zones nationally, as described in the previous chapter on the research findings. The ‘case studies’ are not intended to provide ‘typical’ examples of small zones, but represent instances of the varying dynamic contexts of zones as illustrated through descriptive narrative accounts of real people working in real situations. The data for the case studies were derived from a variety of sources, which included a study of zone documentation, responses to the questionnaire survey (described in Chapters 4 and 5) and the site visits.

During the site visits interviews with the zone directors were conducted using the common interview schedule (see Appendix 3) and informal discussions took place with teachers working in the zones. However, these site visits were less successful than anticipated in some respects. The visits did elicit additional useful information from the directors, but the informal discussions with teachers took place in a random fashion in staffrooms and varied according to the teacher’s individual experience of the work of the zone, which was often very limited. Time constraints prevented any discussions with pupils that may also have revealed interesting insights into their experiences of the zone innovations. Little information about the zones was found on staffroom notice boards and although some very good displays of zone activities were found in some primary schools, very little evidence was found in any of the secondary schools visited.

The names of the zones have been replaced by pseudonyms to provide confidentiality and anonymity, as requested by the zone directors. Selected aspects of the findings from each of the five case studies will be described in this chapter in the form of individual short descriptive vignettes, in order to provide a flavour of the nature of the zones and to illuminate some of the influences on the development of innovations in small (EiC) Action Zones within different settings and contexts. The case studies do not attempt to describe the totality of the zones, but highlight aspects of their situations that may help to provide a broad context to illustrate and exemplify some of the findings and issues described in the previous chapter.

### *Blackwall small (EiC) Action Zone*

Blackwall small (EiC) Action Zone is located within an inner city area of a large conurbation mainly containing a mixture of Victorian terraced housing and newer council estates, with few local industries and no major business employers. The LEA already had a large cluster of schools involved in a statutory EAZ in the south of the borough, which had been operating since May 2000, and took the opportunity of being included in the first phase of Excellence in Cities to develop a small (EiC) Action Zone in another part of the borough. The zone started operating in January 2001 and is comprised of seven primary schools, one of which has been accorded with 'beacon' school status, plus one mixed secondary school. The LEA closed the original secondary school (around which the initial concept for the zone was conceived) during the planning phase for the zone, following a highly critical inspection report about the school. Therefore, another local secondary school had to be found as a late replacement for the zone during the application process to the DfEE. This replacement created some initial difficulties for the zone, as the new secondary school was not geographically close to the primary schools, although it did take some of their pupils.

The zone director was appointed towards the end of the application phase and is employed on a full-time basis by the Local Education Authority and based in their offices, having previously been engaged as an arts inspector in a neighbouring LEA.

The zone priorities are underpinned by the concept of developing a culture of embracing the creative arts in schools as a vehicle to promote improvement. The three key priorities for the zone are:

- To raise attainment in literacy and numeracy through the creative and performing arts, particularly for the gifted and talented pupils;
- To promote citizenship and social inclusion;
- To increase levels of parental involvement through pupils' participation in the creative and performing arts.

During the interview, the director described how the arts based focus of the zone had initially evolved:

Originally my zone was LEA initiated and arose out of an SRB (Single Regeneration Budget) bid, which focused on local arts. The school improvement service and the art/culture staff sat down and tried to get money from the Government as matched funding for the SRB bid.

Applying for a small (EiC) Action Zone was identified by the LEA as one way of obtaining funding for this larger arts initiative being planned for the area and this became the driving force behind the creation of the zone. The director had some belated input into the development of the zone action plan, which was created by an external consultant, but he did not know how the key priorities had been determined. He knew that there had been some consultation with the zone headteachers before the plan was drawn up, but by the time the director was appointed most of the original heads had left. The complicated situation that he had inherited on appointment is typical of many



of the zones to some extent and illustrates the challenges facing directors when setting up the small zones. The starting position for the schools in the Blackwall small (EiC) Action Zone was summarised by the director:

When the zone started I had a secondary school which had joined the zone late, as the original secondary school had closed down, one head who had been on secondment for a year, three completely new heads and another head who had been around for a long time but his school had just been judged as having serious weaknesses.

The director considered that the original plan, accepted by the DfEE, was “massively complex and unmanageable”. It also included features that had not been endorsed by some of the zone headteachers, leading to some initial resistance and a perceived lack of ownership by the schools. One of the director’s first tasks was to refocus the work of the zone to concentrate on the arts and to start to revise and rationalise the action plan accordingly:

To an extent, what was demanded of me in the first six months was to be very firm about what I thought mattered and to hold a vision. In the early stages, the two or three capable heads took me on and we had some quite heated discussions. The less confident heads kind of watched from the sidelines.

The action plan contained two main innovations to deliver the zone priorities:

- A major ‘artists in residence’ programme for new projects to employ professional creative and performing artists to work with pupils in the schools;
- The appointment of EAZ coordinators in each zone school to manage the creative arts programmes.

Neither of these innovations was initiated until September 2001, two terms after the zone had started. This delay was due to the need to audit the arts provision that already existed within the schools in order to provide a baseline for the work of the zone. Formal procedures leading to the identification of staff within each school, who could

take on the role of coordinating teacher, and getting the agreement of the Zone Forum to finance these new posts took up the whole of the summer term. By September 2001, a zone infrastructure had been established, which allowed for a planned cycle of school EAZ coordinator's meetings to take place, a residential conference to be held, and a range of long term projects involving visiting professional artists, performers, musicians etc. to be introduced, tailored to the needs of the schools.

The director felt that there had not really been sufficient time to evaluate the impact of the innovations for the purposes of this research, even though the zone was actually nearly half way through its official three-year lifetime when the data were collected. Informal discussions with some school staff during a site visit reinforced this view. Although the primary staff felt that some public performances had raised the profile of the zone, most felt unaware of the work of the zone and its innovations had not impacted upon their classroom teaching. Interestingly the staff of the secondary school seemed more aware of the zone than in many of the other secondary schools visited for the case studies. They attributed this to both the vigorous debate about joining the zone, which occurred after the original secondary school had been closed, and the focus on creative and performing arts that was having a demonstrable impact on the school.

The constraints to the introduction of these innovations outlined by the director included getting the headteachers to "think outside of the box" and their nervousness about risk taking; a lack of teacher confidence in the arts; high teacher turnover and entrenched views about the arts being regarded as a 'treat' for the pupils without any intellectual rigour.

The other main issue that he raised was about attracting external funding for the zone, which reflected the feelings described by many of the small zone directors in the research:

I don't get much external sponsorship, we just plan to do what we have to do with the money that we have got, so it's not actually a priority...maybe I am being naïve. This LEA is not great at attracting money; we have no big businesses or industry even though we are in an inner city borough. It also takes a lot of time and I think that I would have to spend a lot of core money to attract other money and I don't think that that's on.

### *Broadway small (EiC) Action Zone*

Broadway small (EiC) Action Zone is situated in an outer city suburban residential area consisting mainly of post-war private and council housing. The area has one major employer, an international engineering company, but many of the residents commute to work in the city centre. Many parents, especially those of secondary aged children, send their children to schools outside of the local area in other neighbouring LEAs or to independent schools. The pupils in the zone schools mainly come from the local council housing estates, are predominantly of white working class origin and over 50 per cent are entitled to free school meals.

The LEA was invited to join the second phase of expansion of the Excellence in Cities initiative in September 2000 and approached the headteachers of the secondary schools to express an interest in becoming involved with a small (EiC) Action Zone. The LEA had not previously had any EAZ involvement and although many of the headteachers were interested in their schools becoming Specialist Schools or Beacon Schools as part of the EiC programme, the response towards being in a small (EiC) Action Zone was less positive.

The situation leading to the formation of the zone was summarised by the director in her interview, as follows:

The head of the zone secondary school sat in on an EiC meeting with the other heads two years ago and they all said that they did not want to be in a zone because they associated zones with failing schools. He realised that it was a good opportunity to grab a quarter of a million pounds, if no one else wanted it.

This secondary headteacher then approached the heads of his feeder primaries and applied to the DfEE to establish a zone. The zone was officially given approval to start in September 2001, although it was not formally launched until October of that year. It consists of six primary schools, two special schools and two mixed secondary schools. The inclusion of a second secondary school into the zone resulted from pressure exerted by the LEA, which felt that the zone would offer support for a struggling school. The zone director described the situation:

He (the proactive secondary headteacher, described above) had to take in another secondary school because of the local politics of the LEA, which wanted to support a failing school in the area. The politics between the two secondary schools are quite complex.

The director was appointed to a full time position, employed by the zone, from February 2001. She had previously been a secondary headteacher in another LEA, but prior to that post she had been a deputy in a local school and was known to the zone headteachers. She was appointed early enough to be able to write the action plan for the zone, in consultation with the headteachers, for submission to the DfEE. Therefore she was one of the few zone directors who did not inherit a plan constructed by someone else prior to their appointment. However, the action plan was based on the priorities that had already been decided by the zone headteachers, principally by the lead secondary headteacher and consultants that had been employed, prior to the director's

appointment. The original overall aim of the zone, as proposed by the lead secondary head, was ‘to raise achievement at KS3 in English, Maths, Science and ICT’. This was later amended and broadened to provide some incentive for the primary schools to want to be in the zone, but the basic thrust of the original aim remained intact in the priorities. The final main priorities for the zone became:

- Improving the quality of teaching in English, Maths, Science and ICT by developing teachers’ understanding of how pupils learn;
- Developing pupils as independent learners;
- Developing transition programmes in English, Maths, Science and ICT both at individual pupil level within schools and at transfer from primary to secondary school.

The range of innovations developed within the zone schools to support these priorities has included employing writers in residence, mentoring support and summer schools. However, the most important innovation funded by the zone involved the identification of a team of 22 teachers from across all of the ten schools (four per secondary, two per primary, and one from each special school) be released from teaching for one day per week to take part in an ongoing training programme on effective learning, developed in partnership with a local Higher Education institution. This staff development initiative across the zone has enabled the teachers involved to share expertise and knowledge of their schools, benefit from expert tuition from an external provider and take a lead role on promoting effective teaching and learning strategies in their own schools. The zone director suggested that, as a result of this programme “the partnership between the schools has been the main thing to come out of the zone, especially for the special schools”. She was also adamant that the staff development initiative was planned to be sustainable after the zone funding had finished, as the expertise generated and focus on improving teaching and learning would remain in the schools, even if all of the staff on

the zone team left. Informal discussion with staff in the schools suggested that the teachers involved in this staff development initiative felt that it was the best training that they had ever received and that it had had a real impact on their teaching.

The main issue that the director raised concerned the dynamics between the two secondary schools in the zone and their relationships with the primary schools. As noted earlier, one secondary was instrumental in initiating the zone while the other was forced into the zone by the LEA. In the short time that the zone had been in operation when the research was carried out, the situation between the schools had worsened, as described by the director:

The relationship between the 'failing' school is more difficult, their roll is falling and they are not recruiting from the primaries in the zone, even though one is on the same site.

Over the same period, the lead secondary school had become increasingly popular and oversubscribed, particularly from the zone primaries. The director saw a major part of her work in the future as trying to redress this balance between the two secondary schools in the zone to make them equally popular with pupils in the primary schools. However, during the data collection exercise, the LEA announced that the 'failing' secondary school would be closed in 2003 and replaced by a City Academy. The implications for the zone had not been clarified and the director was uncertain about whether the new school would be regarded as part of the zone, typifying the dynamic nature of the schools and the staff in the zones as outlined in the previous chapter.

### *Queensway small (EiC) Action Zone*

The schools in Queensway small (EiC) Action Zone are in an area close to the centre of a large city. The zone is in a discrete geographical area bounded by major roads and

railway lines, with many small industries found along these routeways. The district is undergoing a major regeneration programme, with the older Victorian housing stock currently being gentrified for the affluent city workers intermixed with large council housing estates, which are undergoing substantial improvements. Over 60 per cent of the pupils in the zone schools are entitled to free school meals and over one third have English as an additional language. The school population is also highly mobile as families constantly move into and out of the area. This situation, combined with high teacher turnover, has created long term problems of stability and continuity in all of the schools in the zone with falling rolls leading to the closure of one of the zone primary schools.

The zone is located in the southern part of a relatively small Local Education Authority, which had already established a large statutory EAZ serving schools in the north of the borough and has two other small (EiC) Action Zones operating within its boundaries.

The Queensway zone officially started in September 2000, although the director did not take up his post until January 2001. The zone originally comprised of six primary schools, although the LEA closed one of these in July 2002, plus one single sex secondary school. The secondary school had already acquired Specialist School Status and was developing a City Learning Centre (CLC) on its site, as part of the Excellence in Cities initiative prior to the development of the zone. The main driving force behind the creation of the zone was the headteacher of the secondary school and one of the primary heads, as indicated by the director:

I would say that out of my heads, two of them had the insight to see the broader picture and the opportunities that the EAZ presented. The other five just thought it was a good thing because it might bring some resources.

The strength of the secondary school provision for ICT underpinned the zone Action Plan, which was initiated by the two headteachers and the LEA EiC coordinator, before employing an external consultant to formulate it into the original DfEE application for the zone. The priorities for the zone emerged as:

- To develop the potential of Gifted and Talented pupils;
- The professional development of teachers;
- To improve parental and community involvement, in order to improve the perception of the work of the schools in the zone.

The director described the inclusion of the first priority as an undisguised attempt by the secondary headteacher to attract more of the Gifted and Talented pupils from the zone primary schools into the secondary school in order to improve examination results.

The director had had previous experience working on a major project involving ICT in another LEA, as an Ofsted inspector and as an educational management consultant. He was appointed by the zone, on a part-time basis (three days per week) with the specific brief to implement the zone priorities through the development of ICT in all of the schools. His office is located in one of the zone primary schools. He was not involved with the writing of the action plan, which he then had to implement and as he indicated in his interview:

In all honesty, it did not hang together and needed a massive re-write from the beginning. It gave me a handle, which I could build on – throughout the three priority areas was threaded ICT. Initial surveys ...identified two things, that the secondary school had very good ICT facilities and structure, and that the primary schools ICT infrastructure was poor, basically due to years of under-investment and a lack of expertise.



The focus of the innovative work of the zone became ICT as a delivery mechanism to enable new approaches to teaching and learning to be developed. The initial plan was to use the zone funding to ensure that all of the schools had sufficient ICT resources, state of the art computer suites and an infrastructure to link them all together into a single network system across the zone. The serendipitous finding that the geographical distribution of the seven schools in the zone had created a direct 'line of sight' between each primary school and the secondary school facilitated a unique opportunity to connect them all together using a broadband laser-linked network. The installation of this system, centred on the secondary school, enabled the zone pupils and teachers to work together through video-conferencing facilities, plus sharing expertise, resources and experiences without having to leave their own schools. Other zone ICT innovations such as the provision of interactive whiteboards and teacher training in using the technology ensured that the schools embedded this technology into their curriculum and pedagogy in order to "encourage independent learning and equip pupils with the skills to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century", while zone-based technicians ensured that the system was always fully functioning.

The potential impact on the zone priorities of these developments in ICT are anticipated as being to broaden the access to a wider range of opportunities and skills for Gifted and Talented pupils, provide a focus for professional development for teachers through a new medium and to develop community use of the facilities, thereby immersing more parents into the school environment. The director anticipated that the ICT innovations would move some of the schools "from the Stone Age to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century". He felt that the schools needed to start to regard the potential of ICT for learning as being far more versatile than simply being about improving the pupil's access to computing resources. The focus in the first year of the zone was to fully equip all of the schools with

computer suites and set up the common network, which had been completed. During the second year, when the research took place, the emphasis had moved on to staff development in ICT. One of the concerns that the director had was about the high turnover of staff and the need for a rolling programme of training to ensure the best use of the resources in the future. In the third year of the zone the director planned to develop the community use of the ICT facilities in the schools, but was anticipating some difficulties revolving around access, management and conflicts of interest within some individual zone schools.

The main issues for future developments raised by the director revolved around sustainability of the innovations, in terms of maintaining the ICT facilities at the highest and most up-to-date standard, if the funding stream provided by the zone dries up. He also had concerns about the long-term commitment of all of the zone headteachers, some of whom were reluctant to endorse the focus on ICT at the start, once the initial impetus and excitement of the venture wears off. The director suggested that some of the headteachers believed that he was pushing them too quickly into areas they felt uncomfortable with, that this had led to “an essential conflict in trying to promote change” which would prevent the momentum of the zone continuing if the zone were to finish after three years.

#### *Freshwater small (EiC) Action Zone*

The schools in the Freshwater small (EiC) Action Zone are in the central part of the same LEA as the Queensway case study described in the previous section of this chapter. The schools in the zone serve a mixed residential area, dominated by two very large council housing estates, which provide most of the pupils for the zone schools. The zone started in September 2001 and consists of four primary schools plus the local

mixed secondary school. In the most recent Ofsted inspections of the quality of education provided by these five schools in the zone, one had been judged have serious weaknesses and another was considered to be failing its pupils and in need of 'special measures' to improve. Although it is literally a 'small' zone, the challenges faced by the schools are comparable to any of the other larger EiC Action Zones around the country.

The director was appointed in September 2000 on a part-time basis (four days per week) and employed by the zone. She had worked as a lecturer in a local university prior to her appointment to the zone, having previously had a diverse background in both higher education and industry.

The driving force behind the initiation of the zone had been the secondary headteacher, who then encouraged the small group of local primary schools to be part of the zone. However, in the 18 months following the start of the zone, all of the original headteachers in every one of the zone schools (including the secondary) had left and been replaced. This led to difficulties concerning the ownership of the zone priorities, determined during the earlier planning stages of the zone and allegiance to the concept of the zone itself. The priorities focused on raising achievement through:

- Increasing family commitment to learning and the capacity to learn through building partnerships with parents and carers and supporting pupils and families most at risk;
- Improving transition between different phases of education from nursery to post-16;
- Raising standards in the core subjects and ICT at each Key Stage.

The major thrust of the initial innovations in the zone has been focused on the first priority of getting parents to become more involved with the education of their children

and the work of the schools, while at the same time encouraging the schools to value the parents. Zone activities, which have focused on and encouraged community involvement, included funding each school to have a home/school liaison worker, the initiation of parents and family learning courses, providing individual school information points for parents and encouraging parents to participate in a wide range of events hosted by the schools. The director described her view of the underlying principle behind this work as improving the self-esteem and motivation of children through “parental engagement as the key to raising attainment in schools and breaking the cycle of disadvantage”. As a result of their involvement in these zone activities, the director felt that:

Pupils will have gained a small sense of achievement and of pride. However, converting this into higher SATs or GCSE grades is a bigger, deeper problem and must lie within the creative relationship between the school, the parents and the child. Crucial to this, is the child’s sense of themselves and their perception of their place in the world around them. The EAZ seeks to enable and facilitate links where possible and to encourage the child’s sense of value, hope and fun.

However, the problems relating to the recruitment and retention of staff (especially heads) in the zone schools had been a major constraint to the work of the zone since its inception. As well as the lack of ownership of the zone priorities, noted earlier, the receptiveness of the schools to zone innovations had constantly changed. As noted by the director:

I would say that some of the schools have kept the EAZ away and excluded the EAZ from certain things. For example, everyone was invited to take part in one project and two of my primary heads did not want to know – I don’t think that they even discussed it with their teachers. There have been a number of other things like that where ideas with real value and potential have been offered, but not taken up, even when the LEA have encouraged them to.

Not only the changes of headteachers, but also the different approaches of the heads have been perceived as creating obstacles for the work of the zone:

One head has been terribly constrained and not interested, another has just been out for what she can get for her school, while another was so unpredictable that it was really difficult working with her and she could be so negative and so rude. Another head is rather ineffective and doesn't take decisions or push things through to make them happen. So there has only been one head who has been open, positive, enthusiastic and interested, willing to take a risk – this has been a very, very big issue for me.

The main issues in the Freshwater small (EiC) Action Zone revolve around the ramifications of engaging a rapidly changing teacher force in the work of the zone, plus a focus on improving parents engagement with the education of their children aimed at long term outcomes for raising pupil achievement which may not be reflected in short term improvements in the Key Stage and GCSE results during the lifetime of the zone.

#### *Southbank small (EiC) Action Zones*

Southbank is a generic name that has been applied in this research to two contiguous small EiC Action Zones located in the same local Education Authority. The area served by the zones is mainly residential, with high levels of unemployment and intense poverty. The LEA already had a large statutory EAZ operating at the time the Excellence in Cities initiative was launched and responded quickly to the opportunity for developing small zones in other parts of the borough.

The Southbank zones were part of the original national group of 12 Phase One small zones, which came into operation in April 2000 (see Appendix 4). They had evolved out of two separate groups of schools coming together to support each other on common issues, but working in complete isolation.

The genesis of the two Southbank zones was described by the director as follows:

A group of headteachers in one of the zone areas had, long before EAZs had been thought about, got together. Four or five of them from very difficult schools, some of the most challenging schools in the borough actually.... to work together on issues that they felt they were all struggling with. These were all primary schools.

Meanwhile in the other zone area, there were another two or three schools who were looking at the issues of being 'estate schools'....based around estates undergoing neighbourhood renewal. The heads got onto the neighbourhood action group... to build some sort of partnership with the community.

Both groups had meetings with the LEA Chief Inspector, who at the time was involved in the planning for the implementation of the various strands of Excellence in Cities. He saw the two groups as the perfect focus for bids for the creation of two small action zones. Other schools were added to the original clusters of schools until both zones comprised of six or seven primary schools, a nursery school and a secondary school. Neither of the secondary schools was originally very keen on becoming involved in the zones and recently the LEA announced plans to close one of them in 2004, curtailing any plans the zone may have had for the school in implementing new innovations. The consultation with the schools about the main concerns for the zones resulted in both zones having almost identical priorities. Therefore, following approval of the separate applications from the DfEE, the LEA decided to put the two zones together under the management of a common full-time director, employed directly by the Education Authority and based in their headquarters, alongside the other co-ordinators responsible for the different strands of Excellence in Cities.

The director who was appointed to manage the two zones had previously been a primary headteacher in another school in the same LEA. However, she did not know

about the historical background to the two zones when she took up the position and had not been involved in the original writing of the Action Plans for either of the zones.

This led to a situation, which she described as follows:

What I didn't realise until long afterwards was that their purposes were very different and they (the schools) weren't happy to be put together under one umbrella. That wasn't what they had originally wanted. One zone particularly felt that their agenda had been undermined and that the Authority had hijacked it, and felt that their original group had been sidelined by the zone. There were huge political undercurrents with these two zones and the heads, which it took me ages to work out.

It wasn't until we did a two day strategy conference, where we took the heads away to a hotel and worked hard on them, unpicking what we were doing and what it was all about and letting them have their say, unburden what was blocking us moving forward, and why some heads were taking real advantage of the zone while others didn't want anything to do with it.

This 'history' of the zone's development has influenced the type of innovations that the director has tried to implement. The common priorities for both zones are:

- Improving attainment for all pupils;
- Extending learning opportunities for all pupils;
- Improving attendance and punctuality.

While the director has established a wide range of activities to address these priorities, the background to the development of the zone stimulated a need for innovations focused on headteacher and staff development in new approaches to effective learning and in the management of change. These foci are applicable to all phases of education and therefore training and projects can develop across all areas of the zones with the various benefits resulting from economies of scale. They have been welcomed by new headteachers in the zone schools, who have helped to overcome some of the issues that held back the original headteachers involved in the formation of the zones. However,

whereas the rapid change of headteachers in the zones may have helped overcome earlier problems, the constant and rapid turnover of teaching staff has disrupted the continuity of the training and its implementation in the schools, creating major difficulties.

At the time of the research, the director was finalising the Action Plan for the third (and possibly final) year of the Southbank zones and was unsure whether to write a plan which was effectively an exit strategy for the zones or one which anticipated that the zones would continue in their current form. Despite her requests for clarification, she had been offered no guidance about the future of the small (EiC) from the DfES. As noted by the director:

In our third year, we are only now in the stage of the projects becoming school based, it has taken us this long to make them happen. We have done all of the training, but now it's starting to take off in the schools. I suppose a bit of it will continue in the schools, but it won't continue across the consortium of schools unless we get the two year extension – that's my exit strategy.... to get them operating as a self supporting group.

The background to Southbank small (EiC) Action Zones, as an example of the first phase zones, illustrates some of the difficulties and obstacles experienced in trying to significantly change schools within the constraints of a three-year external initiative and then maintaining its impetus in the future.

### *Chapter Summary*

The various aspects of implementing innovation in the small (EiC) Action Zones illustrated in the five case study vignettes in this chapter provide a broad background context for innovation in the zones, against which the research findings described in Chapters 5 and 6 need to be considered. The research findings from the questionnaires and interviews suggest that there are more similarities than differences in the responses



to issues relating to stimulating innovation in the small zones. These case study vignettes are an attempt to exemplify and contextualise some of the issues encountered by the directors in their zones, providing a localised perspective for the research.

The final chapter will discuss the findings from the research and attempt to draw conclusions about the impact that the introduction of small (EiC) Action Zones has had on stimulating innovation in zone schools.

## Chapter 8

### Discussion and Conclusions

The final chapter of this study is in two parts. Firstly, a brief discussion of the implications of the findings from the empirical research in response to the research sub-questions, shown below:

- What do the directors of small (EiC) Education Action Zones understand by the term ‘innovation’ in school and educational settings?
- What types of innovations have been introduced or planned by the individual small (EiC) Education Action Zones?
- Are these innovations ‘original’, new to the zones or just extensions of initiatives already introduced elsewhere?
- What impact have these innovations had on the zone schools?
- What are the barriers or constraints to the introduction of innovations within the small (EiC) Education Action Zones?

Secondly, the conclusion draws on the investigation to focus on a consideration of the following main research question:

“What impact has the introduction of small (EiC) Education Action Zones had on stimulating educational innovation in zone schools in the inner city areas of England?”

#### *Discussion*

As noted in Chapter 1, the concept of innovation as portrayed in the literature is somewhat nebulous, vague and open to multiple interpretations, but it is one that the current Labour Government has advocated as central to many of its educational reforms since it came to power in 1997. The importance of the concept of innovation to the current Government can be judged by the ‘Modernising Government’ White Paper

(Cabinet Office, 1999), which contains over 330 references to 'innovation' in its programme of change across its departments. The continuing centrality of innovation in the Government's approach to education was reflected in the launch of an independent 'Innovation Unit' within the DfES in June 2002, "aimed at spreading teachers' good ideas" (Henry, 2002, p.18) throughout the school system. There is also legislation within the Education Act 2002 for a 'Power to Innovate' process, whereby schools can apply for "temporary disapplication of any area of education legislation for a period of three years to test innovative pilot projects that lead to higher educational standards" (DfES, 2002c), which again indicates that improvement through innovation is still regarded as a major element of the Government's strategy to raise achievement or perhaps, more accurately, attainment. However, by April 2003 only two schools had applied for this new 'Power to Innovate' (Mansell, 2003) and both of these wanted to change the length of their school day (for which legislation already exists). This may suggest a similar uncertainty at the wider school level about the meaning of innovation, as that found in this research into innovation in the EiC Action Zones. The Government's view of innovation described by the current Secretary of State for Education, Charles Clarke (DfES 2002e), still appears to be limited and almost exclusively dominated by the localised 'freedoms' to deregulate teacher's pay and conditions and the National Curriculum, as it had been in the Excellence in Schools White Paper which first established EAZs in 1997 (despite the fact that none of the statutory EAZs chose to adopt these legislative 'freedoms').

Stimulating innovation has been a central feature of the Education Action Zone initiative, for both large and small zones, over the past five years. It is seen as a means of promoting new possibilities for raising the achievement of pupils in areas of socio-economic deprivation, to "achieve the objective of motivating young people in tough

inner city areas” (DfEE, 1997, p.40) throughout the whole Excellence in Cities initiative, but is perhaps more fundamental to the work of the small Action Zones than to any of the other EiC strands. However, the guidance produced by the DfEE (2000) on the establishment and operation of statutory EAZs has consistently lacked any specificity, outside of the deregulatory ‘freedoms’ relating to teacher’s pay and conditions, disapplication of the National Curriculum and school governance (described in Chapter 2), about the nature or type of innovation that might be employed by zones to achieve this objective. The guidance on innovation in the small EiC Action Zones is equally vague and open-ended (DfEE 1999a, DfES 2001e). This research has indicated that directors of the small zones generally regarded the lack of centralised direction as a positive opportunity, potentially giving them a relatively free rein to develop innovations that address issues directly related the local context of their zone schools. However, as will be seen later in this chapter, a variety of factors have restrained the type and scope of innovations introduced into the EiC Zones.

The research findings from this study indicate that the directors of small (EiC) Action Zones generally understood the meaning of the term ‘innovation’ as relating to the key terms ‘new’ and ‘change’, in line with the dictionary definition of the term indicated in Chapter 1. However, there were a number of other interpretations of innovation including creativity, additionality and flexibility, which reflected a degree of uncertainty about how to construe the limited guidance, originally provided by the DfEE, or indicated the lack of clarity about the meaning of innovation. None of the directors felt that the innovations that they had introduced to their zones were completely original (or needed to be), but they were often applications or modifications of ideas that had previously been tried elsewhere. These innovations were generally new to the zone schools rather than new per se, introduced in an attempt to try out

different and potentially better ways of tackling school improvement that had been perceived to have been successful in other contexts.

The types of innovations developed, or planned, in the small zones over the past two years to meet their priorities, focused around additional pupil support, curriculum enhancement, improved ICT resources, developing partnerships and increased community involvement (as detailed in Chapter 6), were fairly limited in their scope. This is a result of a variety of factors acting on the zones that have suppressed the potential opportunity to make truly radical imaginative changes. These factors include the historical conservatism of schools, the pressures of accountability, the demands on schools to implement a range of other government initiatives, the relatively small amount of funding available to zones and the short time frame for the life of the zones.

Another limitation, on the types of innovation initiated, may have also resulted from the zone directors and headteachers having an incomplete knowledge and experience of successful innovations that have been implemented elsewhere, a situation that the new DfES Innovation Unit may be able to address in the future. Therefore, most of the zone innovations that have been introduced were, as already noted, not really new and in some cases could even be regarded as extensions of pre-existing initiatives in zone schools. For example, the main category for the responses to 'types of innovation' in the research findings (Chapter 6) revolved around innovations providing extra support for pupil learning. These innovations often used the zone funding to employ additional staff such as Learning Mentors, Classroom Assistants, Education Welfare Officers, School/Home Liaison Workers, etc., to work with targeted groups of pupils in order to raise their levels of achievement. All of these additional staff can be found in non-zone schools around the country, therefore their use is not innovative in itself. It may be

argued that the way they are used in zone schools, such as working with pupils across the primary/secondary divide, may be regarded as innovative; but this could also be viewed as a pragmatic response to sharing resources across the zone schools.

Similarly, the curriculum innovations described by the zones were mainly concentrated in areas such as support for individual pupils in literacy and numeracy or those that have traditionally incurred high financial costs, such as employing professional artists, actors and musicians to enhance the teaching of the creative arts or improving ICT resources. One problem encountered by many zone directors was the introduction, subsequent to the start of their zones, of new Government funding streams (such as Creative Partnerships and the primary pilot of the EiC initiative) or support mechanisms (such as the Key Stage Strategies) related to the same areas for improvement as those initially prioritised by the zone. This led to directors having to revise their original plans and suggest new innovations to meet their key priorities, which were fixed by the DfES during the zone application process.

As noted in Chapter 6, the majority of the directors who were interviewed for the research felt that the motivation for most of their headteachers to be in a zone was the prospect of accessing extra funding rather than the opportunity to try out new ideas. So the emphasis in the zones on using funding for additional material or human resources, noted above, is not surprising. These findings reflect a comment by Silver (1997) that, “innovation inevitably takes advantage of ...precedent, opportunity, new technology and context, harnessing resources and collaboration and may adopt or adapt existing initiatives” (p.11). However, the concentration on using the zone funding for additional physical or human resources rather than working towards systemic or cultural change in the schools has implications for the longer-term sustainability of

many of these innovations when the zone funding ceases. This concern is reflected in the DfES (2002f) paper on the Future of EiC Action Zones:

There is a danger of EiC Action Zones becoming reliant on their extra funding and not developing strategies to mainstream effective programmes (p.3).

Perhaps the most positive and durable innovation that emerged from the research is the creation of active partnerships between the zone schools. The zone structure necessitated schools working together, breaking down the often insular and isolated existence that many schools traditionally operate in (even when they are physically located very close to one another in many urban areas). These partnerships have developed at a variety of levels from headteachers and staff exchanging good practice or working across phases, to pupils sharing the facilities of other zone schools or being involved in whole zone activities. It is this type of innovation, stimulated by the existence of the Action Zones, that is probably most likely to continue after the zone initiative has finished and one which could be relatively easily transferred to other clusters of schools that have not yet experienced the benefit of being part of a zone. These findings about developing partnerships reflect those of the consortium evaluating the whole EiC project (Stoney et al. 2002), which notes that “new collaborative models of school-LEA and school-to-school working were emerging, which were breaking down traditional barriers to cooperation at local level” (p.8). In EiC areas, these partnerships may well provide the future basis for the ‘collaboration’ or ‘federation’ of schools as proposed in the Education Act 2002 (DfES 2001f).

The findings from the research into the impact of innovations initiated by the zones are inconclusive. The zones studied had, at the longest, only been in operation for two years when the research took place, and most reported that they had not had time to

make any significant impact. Many indicated that they had had a slow start due to a delay in appointing a director and/or the need to re-write the zone plans, others were only at the initial implementation stages for innovations, some were experiencing the 'implementation dip' described by Fullan (1992) that is part of the change process once the initial enthusiasm wears off. The responses in the research generally indicated the directors' views of the anticipated potential impact of their zone innovations, rather than any actual impact. In the majority of zones, the expected initial short term impact was generally aligned to the Government agenda of raising standards, as defined by improving pupil attainment levels in end of Key Stage and GCSE assessments. This often reflected the pressure that many directors felt under from the DfES and their LEAs to demonstrate almost immediate quantifiable results from their work and the additional funding that they brought to zone schools.

Many zone directors also reported that they were looking for impact in areas that were difficult to measure or assess quantitatively, such as 'changing the culture' of schools and 'changing pupil attitudes' to be more positive towards the education process. Very few directors reported that they had yet established any rigorous methods for evaluating or measuring the impact of the innovations that they had initiated to promote these changes. These innovations were often planned to be long-term in nature and it was generally recognised that they may not produce any discernable impact during the three-year initial lifetime of the zone. Several directors also described the difficulties of monitoring the impact of zone activities discretely from the plethora of other strategies to raise standards that were taking place in schools. The findings from the evaluation of the statutory EAZs described by Halpin (2002) that "the diversity of strategies being implemented in any one zone makes it impossible to work out what makes a difference and what does not" (p.6), is equally applicable to the work of the small zones. The



directors generally regarded these issues as a major challenge to overcome in accounting for the value added by the zones in terms of raising standards in schools.

The barriers and constraints to the introduction of innovations within the small (EiC) Education Action Zones indicated in the research findings can be viewed from two perspectives – i) those internal to the zone schools, and ii) the external pressures from the demands of the DfES, LEAs and funding providers. The internal resistance in many zones is a consequence of the relentless pressure that many schools feel under resulting from perceived or actual ‘innovation overload’, combined with an inertia which often slows down the process of change. Although the zone schools may embrace the concept of the Action Zone as an impetus for positive change, the reality of the school culture acts as a brake on the momentum for innovation and often dilutes the more creative or imaginative aspects of any new idea.

The zone directors themselves have come from varying professional backgrounds and this has had an influence on their status as managers of the zones. They functioned as a quasi-external agency of change, working closely with the zone schools, but they were not an integral part of the schools. Most directors were not part of the initial development of their zones and inherited an action plan that they were required to implement, therefore they needed to establish ‘ownership’ of the plans for themselves and their schools, often within a very dynamic and mobile local education climate, as indicated by the rapid turnover of headteachers in many zones. The consequences of this type of dilemma for zone directors are noted in James and Connolly (2000):

One difficulty with putting into action any model for the implementation of change is that those initiating the change are left with the problem of deciding exactly what actions to take. The contexts and content of change are so varied that it can be difficult to know what to do, or where to start (p.27).

The leadership (and diplomatic) qualities required by the zone directors to enable their zone group of relatively autonomous headteachers to function as a cohesive unit to promote improvement through co-operative innovation across a range of schools, may well have been underestimated. Several directors felt that they would have benefited from local training by their LEA to contextualise their work, as part of the induction to the role and the small Action Zone, after their appointment.

The second group of barriers and constraints reported in the research findings emanated from the varying demands on zones from the DfES, LEAs and attracting private sponsorship. The external pressures from the requirement to produce short-term results in line with the agendas of both the DfES and the LEA have already been noted. Some directors reported that they were being subjected to conflicting demands and target setting from the DfES and their LEA. These demands were frequently also at variance with the longer term requirements of the zone plans, developed to meet the specific needs of the schools, which the directors were trying to implement.

These pressures were often compounded by the requirement for small (EiC) Education Action Zones to raise funds through private sponsorship, in order to access matched funding from the DfES. Many directors found this aspect of their work time consuming and difficult, as their zones were located in areas with few (if any) local industries or businesses. Some small zone directors felt that they did not have the experience or skills to access private funding sources and that the basic annual zone budget was insufficient to justify employing someone to take on this role. At the same time, they felt responsible for depriving their zones of up to £100,000 additional funding per annum, which was potentially available to them. This is one aspect of the statutory EAZ initiative that might have benefited from far more consideration by the DfES

before it was directly incorporated into the funding structure for the small zones, as it led to relatively large financial inequalities between the zones that could have been lessened or prevented.

Perhaps the directors of the small (EiC) Education Action Zones should have heeded a note of caution about the difficulties of introducing new innovations from an earlier political adviser, Niccolo Machiavelli, in ‘The Prince’ (1513):

There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things. Because the innovator has for enemies all those who have done well under the old conditions and lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the new.

### *Conclusions*

Small (EiC) Education Action Zones have been created around clusters of inner city schools over the past three years as one part of the Excellence in Cities initiative “designed to raise achievement in urban schools by targeting resources in areas of need and by finding new ways to solve historic problems” (DfES, 2001c, p.13). The small zones evolved from the concept of the large statutory Education Action Zones that had been introduced across the country following the election of the Labour Government in 1997. A major feature in both types of zone is a strong emphasis on initiating innovatory approaches to address the challenges faced by pupils in schools in areas suffering from socio-economic disadvantage. The main purpose of this research was to investigate the impact that the introduction of small (EiC) Education Action Zones has had on stimulating educational innovation in zone schools in the inner city areas of England.

The evidence from the research indicates that the establishment of small (EiC) Education Action Zones has had a catalytic effect on the zone schools to explore a range of innovatory ways for raising standards, which may not have occurred otherwise. The innovations adopted by the zones may not have been original within the wider educational context, but they were generally new to the individual zones and their schools. However, all of the zone directors who took part in the research were adamant that the innovations that they had initiated in their individual zones would not have happened at that point in time, if the zone had not been in existence. It was also noted that the process of becoming a zone has stimulated an active discourse within zone schools about innovation and new opportunities, which was then provided with a structure and funding once the zone had been given Government approval. Most of these innovations in the small zones are still in the early stages of implementation and further research will be needed to examine the effect of these innovations on raising the achievement of pupils in the zones over time.

The newly appointed directors of the small (EiC) Education Action Zones were often faced with a situation in which they had inherited an action plan constructed by someone else, a relatively short time scale in which to show an impact and a diverse group of schools who had not previously worked closely together. This situation, plus the existent pressures of external accountability, placed further constraints on the type of innovation and degree of 'risk taking' that would be acceptable to the schools. The directors were, almost inevitably, forced to consider 'parachuting-in' innovations into their zones that had already been successful elsewhere. However, one of the difficulties encountered by the zone directors in trying creatively to adopt and adapt innovations from one context to another is that, in the words of Fullan (1999), "it is one thing to see an innovation up and running, another to figure out how to get there" (p.151).

The process of change (described more fully in Chapter 3), which accompanies the introduction of innovations into schools, is complex. According to Fullan (1991; 1992; 2001a, 2001b), successful change needs the following conditions: a 'critical mass' of the 'right factors'; depends on the schools 'capacity to change'; organisation and support; time and training. Also it usually meets with resistance, anxiety and uncertainty. The directors involved in this research have experienced all of these aspects of the change process in their attempts to stimulate innovation in their zone schools and have enthusiastically taken on these challenges. However, in their initial eagerness to introduce innovations into the zones, some directors may have misjudged the powerful inertia many schools possess, as described by Rudduck (1991):

In our efforts at change...we have generally underestimated the power of the existing culture of the school and the classroom to accommodate, absorb or expel innovations that are at odds with the dominant structures and values that hold habit in place (p.28).

It is within this context that the zones have initiated a range of innovations to address their individual zone priorities, although many of these innovations have been limited by the barriers and constraints described earlier in this chapter and in Chapter 6. Some of the innovations that have been introduced are very focused on short-term outcomes, such as employing additional classroom assistants to work with targeted groups of underachieving pupils in Year 6 in primary schools to improve their end of Key Stage 2 assessment levels. Others, such as those focusing on pre-school children or diversifying the educational experiences of pupils or involving parents in the educational process, often have much longer-term goals, frequently related to improving social inclusion, which are difficult to demonstrate or measure in terms of raising achievement during the lifetime of the zones.

The apparent policy shift in December 2001, articulated in the new guidelines for small EiC Action Zones (DfES 2001e), to realign the work of the zones more closely with other strands of the Excellence in Cities initiative, also appears to have placed greater emphasis on the zones being able to demonstrate short term improvements in their schools as defined by end of key stage and GCSE results. Several directors suggested that they felt that this policy shift had changed the nature of the zones and had led to them having to justify the validity of any innovations that they developed in their zones that fall outside these short-term parameters for demonstrating success.

The indications from this research are that the small (EiC) Education Action Zones appear to be developing creative and beneficial partnerships between their constituent schools, which did not exist prior to the formation of the zone. However, the small zones seem to have been less successful in operating in a 'joined-up' cohesive way with the other strands of the larger Excellence in Cities initiative (of which they are a part), or with other LEA initiatives to raise achievement. Concern about this was indicated in the new zone guidance, in the statement that there had been a tendency for some small zones to "gravitate towards an isolated, independent existence" (DfES, 2001e) and not operating as a part of the whole EiC initiative.

Although some of the small zones also initially had aspirations for collaborating with other non-educational Area-Based Initiatives (such as local Employment or Health Zones) as part of a 'joined-up' or holistic programme to overcome the socio-economic disadvantages experienced by many pupils in action zone schools, little evidence was found to suggest that this had taken place. This apparent 'insularity' of the small (EiC) Education Action Zones may reflect the short time that they have been operating, plus concentrating on the process of initiating and implementing innovations at school level.

However, it does concur with similar findings from national research (Regional Co-ordination Unit, 2002) about other Area-Based Initiatives, undertaken for the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (2002). In fact, no formal structure actually exists at present for partnerships or linkages between the large and small EAZs, or even for meetings between the individual small (EiC) Education Action Zone directors themselves, although informal local networks have been established across the country.

The value of this research for my professional role as the director of a small (EiC) Education Action Zone has been immeasurable. As noted above and earlier, the zone directors do tend to operate closely with their zone schools, but are relatively isolated from one another. This research has provided me with the opportunity to discover how a wide variety of other zones operate and explore the range of innovations that they have introduced to address their own priorities and circumstances. I have already been able to use these experiences to introduce new ideas into my own zone and advise colleagues, in local informal network meetings of small zone directors, about the research, the findings and the value of the Doctor in Education (EdD), itself. Most of the small zone directors who participated in this research (and the EAZ team at the DfES) were keen to be informed of the outcomes. Therefore it is my intention to summarise these findings and submit them for publication in 'Zonein', the in-house magazine for EAZs produced by the DfES, to reach a wide audience of professional colleagues. I have already had discussions about the research findings with DfES officials who are keen to incorporate them into their thinking about the extension of EiC zones over the next few years and for the imminent transformation of some of the statutory EAZs into EiC Action Zones.

The policy implications arising from this research that may be relevant to professionals and policy makers include the following areas:

- Zones need to concentrate on a small number of high quality initiatives to address their own local needs, rather than spreading their resources too thinly.
- Formal structures need to be developed for zone directors to meet, discuss and feedback issues at a local and national scale.
- The successful development of school partnerships needs to be considered as a possible model for the collaboration or federation of schools.
- Matched funding provision needs to be made more equitable, so that zones are not at a financial disadvantage due to local circumstances.
- The innovations aimed at long term improvement or improvements that are difficult to quantify need to be more highly valued.
- Structured support should be provided to achieve sustainability and continuity of worthwhile developments.

I also intend to disseminate some of the findings of this research through articles for publication in various academic education journals and through contributions to education research seminars. The findings will contribute to the body of knowledge about education policy implementation, school improvement and the management of change, as well as having practical applications in supporting colleagues involved in similar circumstances in their own professional lives, noted above. As discussed in the section on 'ethical issues' in Chapter 4, I have approached this research and the EdD from the perspective and experience of a professional practitioner who has had a close association with trying to improve the achievement of pupils in inner city schools throughout my working life. The research inevitably reflects this standpoint, although it is appreciated that different interpretations of the work may be possible from different perspectives, such as that of a sociologist, economist, political theorist, etc.



Over a quarter of a century ago, Nisbet (1975) noted that rapid change is a feature of contemporary life, whether we like it or not, and made an observation that is even more apposite in the current educational climate at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:

Innovation is not some troublesome irritant which will eventually disappear if we ignore it; it is a means of survival in a rapidly changing environment. Without change, unless we sustain an evolutionary growth in education, our schools will be like the dinosaur, unable to survive because it was unable to adapt (p.6).

Following the introduction of a national system of school inspection by the Office for Standards in Education in the early 1990s, many schools in inner city areas have been judged to be “failing to provide an acceptable standard of education for their pupils” (Ofsted, 1993). Some of these schools have not been able to adapt to the changing educational environment or respond to policy changes over the past ten years and have subsequently been closed. Small (EiC) Education Action Zones were created in the urban areas of England to allow a “more intense focus on (schools in) the most difficult circumstances” (DfEE, 1999b, p.23) and to develop “well-focused and innovative programmes to improve pupil performance” (ibid). The zones have given schools the opportunity to be more adventurous, to try out new ideas, new approaches, new activities and ‘different ways of working’ to tackle the challenges that they face. Schools have been able to work in partnership with one another within a cohesive structure, benefit from additional funding and take greater risks than they otherwise might have thought prudent. It is my personal hope that the innovations initiated in the zones will contribute to improving and enriching the educational experiences for all of the children in zone schools and play a part in preventing any school failure or closure in the future.

The overall conclusion that can be drawn from this research, taking into account the ambiguity surrounding the meaning of the term innovation, is that the small (EiC) Education Action Zones have had an impact on both stimulating educational innovation and encouraging a new discourse about innovation in their zone schools. Although few of the innovations described by the zones in the research could be described as totally original in concept and their overall scope was limited, due to a range of constraining factors; the innovations implemented were generally new to the zone schools and would probably not have happened without the involvement of the EiC Action Zone.

The research questions that now need to be addressed are:

- Will the innovations have a significant long-term impact on raising achievement in the zone schools?
- What lessons can be learned from the experiences of innovation in the statutory EAZs and can these be applied to the EiC Action Zones?
- Will the innovations result in changing the culture of the schools?
- Will the innovations be sustainable when the zone funding is no longer available?

In July 2002, the Government announced its Comprehensive Spending Review, which guaranteed increased funding for Excellence in Cities for at least a further four years (DfES 2002d). This will enable the work of the small (EiC) Action Zones to be extended beyond their initial three year lifetime (at the discretion of their LEA EiC Partnership Board) and provide the opportunity to resolve some of the above questions, which have been raised but left unanswered in this research.

This is the challenge for the future.

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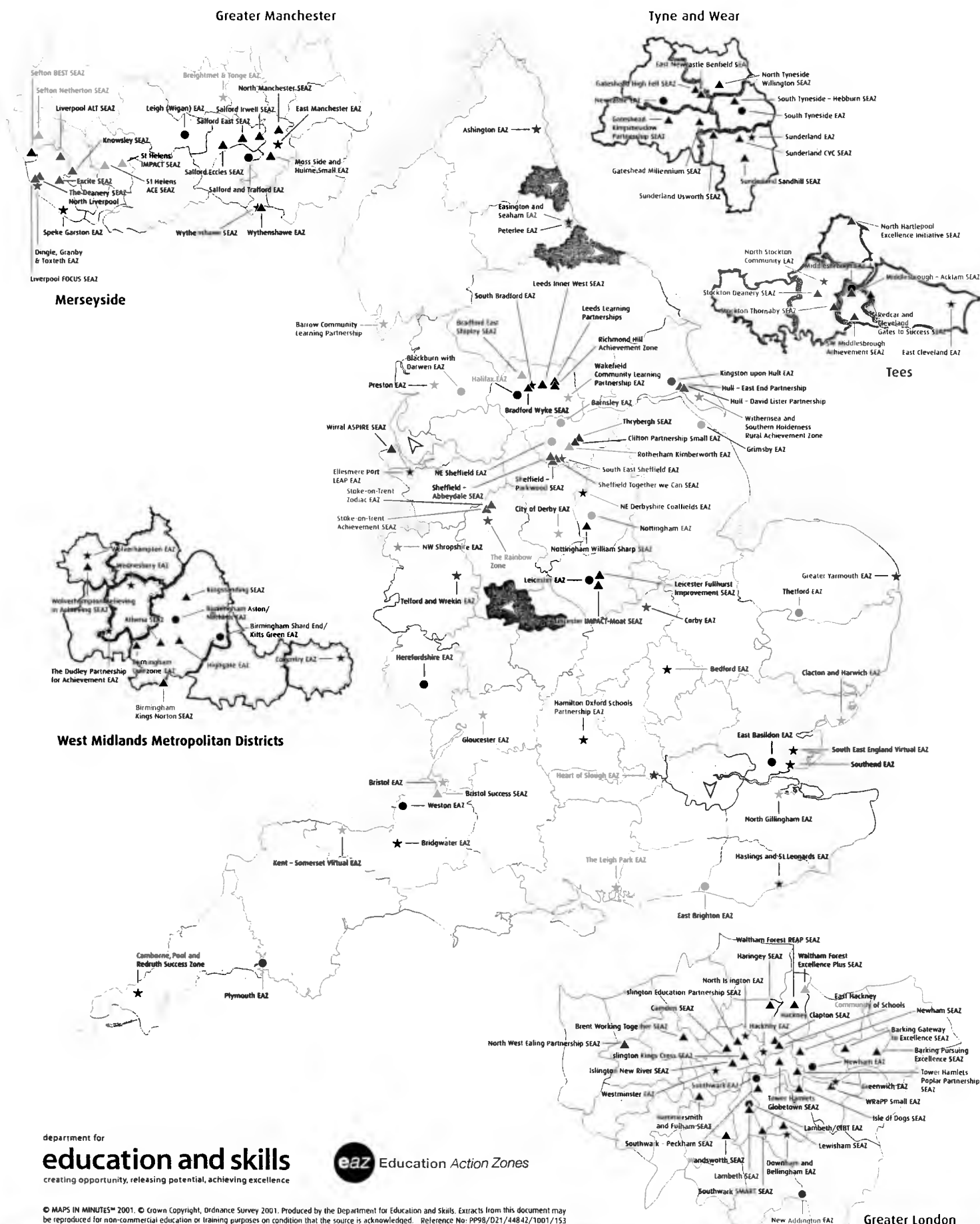
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*Appendix 2. Small (EiC) Action Zone Questionnaire***SMALL (EiC) ACTION ZONE QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Name of Zone:**

**Name of Director:**

**Contact Address:**

**Phone no:**

**Email address:**

**Start Date:**                      month:                      year:

**Local Education Authority:**

**Number of schools in zone:**      **Nursery:**

**Primary:**

**Secondary:**

**Special:**

**Zone Priorities:**

**1.**

**2.**

**3.**

**4.**

*Appendix 2. Small (EiC) Action Zone Questionnaire (continued)*

Please answer the following questions as fully as possible, giving (or attaching) examples of practice wherever possible (all responses will be confidential).

(Continue on the back of the sheets or on separate paper, if you run out of space)

- a) **What do you understand by the term “innovation” within the context of small (EiC) Action Zones?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b) **What innovations (of any sort e.g. curriculum, organisational, behavioural, etc.) have been introduced or are planned in your small (EiC) Action Zone?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- c) **What impact have these innovations had (or do you expect them to have) on your schools?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- d) **What are the barriers or constraints to the introduction of innovations within your small EAZ?**

*Appendix 3. Small (EiC) Action Zone Interview Schedule*

**EiC Action Zone Research Interview Schedule**

**Name:**

**date:**

**Zone:**

**Priorities:**

*Main questions are standard for all interviews but sub-questions related to responses from questionnaire returns.*

**a) What do you understand by the term ‘innovation’ within the context of EiC Action Zones?**

( *summary of questionnaire response* )

1. In your questionnaire answer to ‘what do you understand by innovation’, you talked about .....  
Do you regard innovation as/feel under any pressure to be completely new/original, new to the schools in your zone, extensions of what was already happening?
2. Do you feel that you have been provided with enough guidance/direction on types/expectations of innovation from the DfES or your original zone plan?

**b) What innovations have been introduced in your zone?**

( *summary of questionnaire response* )

1. Why these? How do they relate to the zone priorities?  
Who wrote the zone plan/priorities?  
Did you inherit the original Action Plan?  
Were you involved in its conception?
2. Where did the ideas for the innovations in your zone originate?  
Who thought them up/what was your role?
3. How are/were decisions made about which innovations to adopt?
4. In terms of ‘additionality’, would these innovations taken place if the zone didn’t exist?
5. Do you think that the heads wanted the zone because of the extra funding or the opportunity to try out new ideas?
6. Do you feel that the zone was/is being driven by the secondary school?

*Appendix 3. Small (EiC) Action Zone Interview Schedule (continued)*

**c) What impact have these innovations had (or do you expect to have) on your schools?**

( *summary of questionnaire response* )

1. Has the zone impact been equal across all of the schools?
2. Can you measure whether zone innovations have been successful? (discretely from other initiatives)?
3. Are they sustainable in the long term?
4. What lasting legacy will there be in your schools when the zone finishes after three years?  
What would you expect to have achieved/still be in place if you returned to the zone after ten years?

**d) What are the barriers/constraints to the introduction of innovations within your zone?**

( *summary of questionnaire response* )

1. In terms of your response to the final question on the questionnaire about barriers and constraints, you mentioned .....
  - a. Local issues – schools/LEA/headteachers/time/risk/innovation overload/teacher supply/ other
  - b. National issues – DfES demands/ funding/sponsorship/ short term nature of zone/annual review/ extension/ exit strategies
2. Has the recent change of name to EiC Action Zones had any repercussions for you or your work?

*Thank you for your time and the excellent responses to the questions.*


*Appendix 4. Small (EiC) Action Zone Data*

zone	start month	start year	start phase	no. of schools					priority*	priority 1	priority 2	priority 3	priority 4
				nurs.	prim.	sec.	sp.	total					
1	April	2000	1	1	7	1	0	9	raising attainment	attendance	extending opportunities		
2	April	2000	1	1	6	1	0	8	raising attainment	attendance	extending opportunities		
3	April	2000	1	0	3	1	0	4	transition	families	ICT		
4	April	2000	1	0	6	1	0	7	achievement	attendance	early years	community	
5	April	2000	1	1	7	1	0	9	raising attainment	community	T & L		
6	April	2000	1	0	7	1	0	8	skills	curriculum 3-16	partnerships		
7	April	2000	1	1	7	1	0	9	basic skills	continuity	opportunities		
8	April	2000	1	0	7	1	0	8	T & L	achievement	transition		
9	April	2000	1	0	6	1	1	8	literacy	inclusion			
10	April	2000	1	0	4	1	0	5	families	curriculum 3-16			
11	April	2000	1	0	6	1	0	7	raising attainment	ICT	self-esteem		
12	April	2000	1	0	7	1	0	8	T & L	inclusion			
13	Sept	2000	1	0	5	1	0	6	raising attainment	standards	community		
14	Sept	2000	1	0	9	1	0	10	ownership	attend/exclusion	T & L	creative	
15	Sept	2000	1	0	7	1	0	8	raising attainment	attendance	behaviour		
16	Sept	2000	1	0	7	2	1	10	raising attainment	T & L	family learning		
17	Sept	2000	1	0	6	1	0	7	literacy	arts	transition	inclusion	
18	Sept	2000	1	0	6	1	1	8	new arrivals	raising attainment	G & T	transition	
19	Sept	2000	1	0	5	1	0	6	G & T	T & L	community		
20	Sept	2000	1	0	5	1	0	6	families	transition	achievement		
21	Sept	2000	1	0	6	1	0	7	T & L	attend/crime	centre of excellence.		
22	Sept	2000	1	0	6	2	0	8	T & L	raising attainment	community		
23	Sept	2000	1	0	12	1	0	13	raising attainment	attendance	behaviour		
24	Sept	2000	1	0	7	1	0	8	literacy	numeracy			
25	Sept	2000	1	0	6	1	0	7	attend/punct.	behav/motivation	parents		
26	Sept	2000	1	0	7	1	1	9	raising attainment	T & L	behaviour		
27	Jan	2001	1	0	4	2	1	7	raising attainment	parents	ICT		
28	Jan	2001	1	0	5	1	0	6	raising attainment	parents	engagement		
29	Jan	2001	1	0	7	1	1	9	T & L	transition	ICT		
30	Jan	2001	1	0	6	1	0	7	raising attainment	arts	inclusion		
31	Jan	2001	1	0	10	2	0	12	raising attainment	transition	GCSE		
32	Jan	2001	1	0	8	1	0	9	inclusion	G & T	parents	arts	
33	Jan	2001	1	0	6	1	0	7	raising attainment	extra-curric.	inclusion		
34	Jan	2001	1	0	5	1	0	6	curric dev	community	creative intelligence		
35	Jan	2001	1	0	6	1	0	7	home/school	transition	curriculum enrichment		
36	Jan	2001	1	0	8	1	1	10	raising attainment	attendance	parents		
37	Jan	2001	1	0	5	1	0	6	transition	T & L	community		
38	Jan	2001	1	1	7	1	1	10	raising attainment	transition	inclusion		
39	Jan	2001	1	0	8	1	2	11	raising attainment	transition	inclusion		
40	Jan	2001	1	0	10	1	2	13	raising attainment	transition	vocational in KS4		
41	April	2001	2	0	7	1	0	8	literacy	inclusion	G & T		
42	April	2001	2	0	7	1	0	8	continuity	transition	sec. depts		
43	April	2001	2	0	4	2	1	7	raising attainment	transition	achievement		
44	April	2001	2	0	6	1	1	8	raising attainment	inclusion	mobility		
45	April	2001	2	0	4	1	0	5	attend/punct	raising attainment	achievement		
46	April	2001	2	0	7	1	0	8	T & L	community	initiatives		
47	April	2001	2	0	6	1	0	7	raising attainment	transition	inclusion		



*Appendix 4. Small (EiC) Action Zone Data (continued)*

zone	start month	start year	start phase	no of sch					priority*	priority 2	priority 3	priority 4
				nurs	prim	sec.	sp.	total				
46	April	2001	2	0	7	1	0	8	T & L	community	initiatives	
47	April	2001	2	0	6	1	0	7	raising attainment	transition	inclusion	
48	April	2001	2	0	7	3	0	10	raising attainment	transition	ICT	
49	April	2001	2	0	6	1	0	7	raising attainment	transition	parents	
50	April	2001	2	0	5	1	0	6	raising attainment	attendance	transition	
51	April	2001	2	0	7	2	0	9	raising attainment	community		
52	April	2001	2	2	5	1	1	7	raising attainment	motivation	attend/punct	
53	April	2001	2	0	5	1	0	6	attend/punct	raising attainment	motivation	
54	April	2001	2	0	5	2	1	8	raising attainment	home/school	transition	
55	April	2001	2	0	5	1	0	6	inclusion	raising attainment		
56	April	2001	2	0	7	1	0	8	achievement	motivation	staying on	attend/punc
57	April	2001	2	0	6	1	0	7	achievement	transition	inclusion	
58	April	2001	2	0	9	1	0	10	ICT	transition	arts	
59	Sept	2001	2	1	9	1	1	11	T & L	community	sch pattern	
60	Sept	2001	2	0	6	2	2	10	T & L	transition		
61	Sept	2001	2	0	6	1	2	9	raising attainment	inclusion	G & T	progression
62	Sept	2001	2	0	8	1	0	9	ICT	literacy	G & T	community
63	Sept	2001	2	0	6	1	0	7	transition	G & T	ICT	community
64	Sept	2001	2	0	7	1	0	8	T & L	transition	attend/exclusion	
65	Sept	2001	2	0	4	1	0	5	achievement	raising attainment	leadership	ICT
66	Sept	2001	2	0	11	2	0	13	literacy	G & T	ICT	
67	Sept	2001	2	1	7	2	1	11	raising attainment	learning culture	parents	
68	Sept	2001	2	0	4	1	0	5	T & L	transition	ICT	
69	Sept	2001	2	0	7	1	0	8	raising attainment	transition	attend/punct	Managem/t
70	Sept	2001	2	0	13	3	0	16	literacy	ICT	music	
71	Sept	2001	2	0	6	1	1	8	literacy	inclusion	mobility	
72	Sept	2001	2	1	6	1	0	7	transition	curric extension	ICT	innovation
73	Sept	2001	2	0	10	1	0	11	attendance	raising attainment	attitudes to learning	
74	Sept	2001	2	1	15	3	0	19	attendance	raising attainment	inclusion	
75	Sept	2001	2	0	12	1	0	13	literacy	numeracy	transition	
76	Sept	2001	2	0	8	1	0	9	raising attainment	achievement	attend/punct	
77	Sept	2001	2	0	7	1	0	8	inclusion	transition	T & L	ICT
78	Sept	2001	2	0	3	1	0	4	ICT	writing	motivation	
79	Sept	2001	2	0	6	1	2	9	raising attainment	G & T	extending learning	
80	Sept	2001	2	0	7	1	0	8	raising attainment	leadership	inclusion	

 Zones which returned questionnaires

nurs. = nursery  
prim. = primary  
sec. = secondary  
sp. = special

T & L = Teaching & Learning  
G & T = Gifted & Talented  
ICT = Information & Communications Technology  
community includes home/school liaison, parents and family learning

\* zone priorities approved by DfEE/DfES during application process

Source: DfES EAZ team (accuracy of data confirmed for zones which returned questionnaires)

*Appendix 5. Small (EiC) Action Zone questionnaire and interview data*

Zone start dates	Number of zones	Returned questionnaires	Interviews
April 2000	12	9	4
September 2000	14	9	4
January 2001	14	10	2
April 2001	18	10	4
September 2001	22	12	6
<b>Totals</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>20</b>

Zone locations	Number of zones	Returned questionnaires	Interviews
Greater London	25	20	12
Midlands	9	7	1
Gtr. Merseyside	10	5	3
Gtr. Manchester	8	3	1
Leeds/Bradford	5	4	1
Sheffield/Rotherham	6	4	0
North East	14	4	1
Hull	2	2	1
Bristol	1	1	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>20</b>

*Data for zones used for interviews*

zone	start month	start year	no. of schools					priority 1	priority 2	priority 3	priority 4
			nurs	prim	sec.	sp.	total				
1	April	2000	1	7	1	0	9	raising attainment	attendance	extending opps.	
2	April	2000	1	6	1	0	8	raising attainment	attendance	extending opps.	
10	April	2000	0	4	1	0	5	families	curriculum 3-16		
11	April	2000	0	6	1	0	7	raising attainment	ICT	self-esteem	
17	Sept	2000	0	6	1	0	7	literacy	arts	transition	inclusion
18	Sept	2000	0	6	1	1	8	new arrivals	raising attainment	G & T	transition
19	Sept	2000	0	5	1	0	6	G & T	T & L	community	
20	Sept	2000	0	5	1	0	6	families	transition	achievement	
31	Jan	2001	0	10	2	0	12	raising attainment	transition	GCSE	
32	Jan	2001	0	8	1	0	9	social inclusion	arts/G&T	parents	
50	April	2001	0	5	1	0	6	raising attainment	attendance	transition	
51	April	2001	0	7	2	0	9	raising attainment	community		
52	April	2001	2	5	1	1	7	raising attainment	motivation	attend/punct	
53	April	2001	0	5	1	0	6	attend/punct	raising attainment	motivation	
60	Sept	2001	0	6	2	2	10	T & L	transition		
62	Sept	2001	0	8	1	0	9	ICT	literacy	G & T	community
63	Sept	2001	0	6	1	0	7	transition	G & T	ICT	community
64	Sept	2001	0	7	1	0	8	T & L	transition	attend/exclusion	
69	Sept	2001	0	7	1	0	8	raising attainment	transition	attend/punct	management
77	Sept	2001	0	7	1	0	8	inclusion	transition	T & L	ICT